#TheatreAppreciation

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Cover image by Kiara Pipino.

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Unit II. Professionals in the Theatre: Who Does What?

Foreword

Kiara Pipino

This textbook is certainly not the most comprehensive guide to the world of theatre, but rather, it is more of a handbook, a manual, providing essential information about the field and those who work in it. It was conceived to serve students who are new to theatre and in need of learning the basics so that they can decide for themselves whether to pursue further research in the field by way of other classes and other textbooks… or not.

While the need for scholarly accuracy and thoroughness is of utmost importance in academia, it is just as valuable to understand that it might not be the best route. It can overwhelm beginners with information and details that speak more of the literacy, background and passion of the writer(s) than of the specific requirements of a general education class, such as Theatre Appreciation or Introduction To Theatre. There are plenty of avenues to showcase articles, research papers and monographs, and plenty of upper-level classes or graduate programs where there is a greater layering of the students' knowledge and perspective.

The chapters of this book discuss general concepts and areas of study and also investigate theatre professionals, their creative process and duties. Some chapters feature interviews with artists to provide contemporary insights. Finally, the appendix was written by a former student in the class so that her perspective about the takeaways of the course could be discussed.

A compact bibliography is provided at the end of the book to recommend further readings and literature should the students feel the need for a more in-depth analysis of each topic.

I am immensely grateful to everyone who contributed to this book, professionals and academics alike. Thank you Andrew Kahl, Ingrid De Sanctis, John Bagby, Bethany Marx, Michael Riha, Missy Maramara, Krysta Dennis, Emily Jones and Barbara N. Kahl. Thank you to the kind professionals who accepted to be part of this book too: Alaine Alldaffer, Hal Luftig (a SUNY Oneonta alum!), TJ Young, Shawn Irish and Laura Cole.

I'd like to extend a special thanks to my former student, Gillian Canavan. Every now and then, we teachers are blessed with a student who runs the extra mile – or several extra miles – and invests in the work more than what is required, or expected. Gillian is one of those.

Another special thank you goes to another student of mine, Devyn Hom, who has graciously gone over the text looking for consistency.

This book was realized thanks to the support of the Open Educational Resources (OER) Initiative at SUNY Oneonta. Jennifer Jensen in the Milne Library has been an invaluable asset for the purposes of putting together, formatting and shaping the material.

I hope the readers will appreciate our efforts at providing educational material that is directly related to the curriculum of the class and making it widely available through the Open Access platform. One of the reasons why I embarked on this endeavor was that I was tired of seeing students underperforming in class because they didn't have the money to buy the textbook.

Comments and suggestions (on this form) for further improvements are welcome, as the beauty of the platform itself is that it allows adjustments, rewrites and additions. If you adopt this book to teach a class, let us know on the same form.

Thank you all. Now read the book.

Kiara Pipino

I

Theatre: The Basics

1 Why Theatre?

Kiara Pipino

Theatre has been an integral part of society since the dawn of time. Performance is ingrained in human nature, regardless of social or economic status, ethnicity, and age. We all perform, even in our daily life. That doesn't mean we lie, but rather that we consciously try to present ourselves in the best light possible in order to achieve something we really care about.

Think about a job interview. If you want the job and if you think the job is the right one for you, you will try to positively impress the interviewer. You will "rehearse" your interview in front of a mirror, or you will enlist the help of a friend. You will carefully select what to say and how to say it; you will pick an outfit that you think best suits the expectations of the job and your personality. This isn't all that different from what an actor does.

Theatre allows us to immerse ourselves in a story as it happens live, right in front of our eyes, with real people going through it. It gives us the chance to put ourselves in those people's—the characters'—shoes and almost feel what they feel. The proximity to the action and the shared space makes for an intense experience. Hence, theatre encourages us to develop empathy and to care for other people.

Theatre fosters a sense of community, as well. The audience and performers are all together in the same time and space, witnessing the action and going through a common emotional reaction. While it can be argued that movies achieve the same objective for audiences, movies don't reach the same level of engagement that a good theatrical performance obtains from its audience because the action is more removed from the viewers and only allows a more conscious and superficial connection. A recent study[1] has proved that students who see a production of a play are able to better understand the story and the plot, significantly improve their vocabulary, and develop greater empathy and tolerance as they understand and value the characters. Theatre teaches us how to behave in social situations by providing examples and the opportunity to use them.

By demanding an immediate reaction, theatre forces us to have opinions and exercise our critical thinking, which is one of the reasons why theatre is part of the **Liberal Arts**—from the Latin *Ars Liberalis*[2]—and is present in most colleges and universities in their General Education curriculum. Theatre represents life and human nature, encompassing a variety of subjects and issues through a wide perspective.

What is Theatre?

What do we need in order to have theatre? For something to be considered theatre, you need to have an *actor* telling a *story* and an *audience*, even if it is just one person, listening to it. That is the bare minimum.

The story itself is crucial, but it doesn't have to be scripted. In fact, several theatrical traditions that survive to this day rely on improvisation. Over the centuries, scripts have been developed and playwrights have become famous; scripts are definitely instrumental to theatrical productions, but strictly speaking, they are not necessary.

A dedicated theatrical space isn't necessary either. Of course, it helps to be in a building that has been conceived for theatre productions, but theatre can happen everywhere, as long as there is a space for the actor and for the audience.

Art or Craft?

Is theatre an art? Or is it a craft?

William Shakespeare's Pericles, produced by Prague Shakespeare, 2022. Photo by Kiara Pipino.

Theatre is a form of **art** because it is conceived artistically: the actor interprets

the material and presents it to the audience following a particular artistic vision that is unique to that actor and to that performance only. This is what makes theatre a unique form of art. While the same script can be performed and produced over and over again, every single performance will be different because everything happens live and is tied to a specific concept.

Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* in 1597. Since then, there have been millions of productions of it, if not more. The story is always the same: two young lovers fight to be together despite all obstacles, and tragically they don't succeed. What changes for every production are the actors' interpretations of the roles, the overall vision for the show (which usually comes from the director and the creative team), and the reaction of the audience.

It is important to understand that the actors perform their roles consistently in terms of interpretation and stage positions for any given production, but they are human too! What they receive back from the audience really does impact their performance. This goes back to what was mentioned before: the audience and the actors are going through the experience together, and although they have different roles, they influence each other significantly.

The uniqueness of theatre also relies on the once-in-a-lifetime experience that it provides. The audience experiences a theatre production on a specific day, and that will be it. Even if they attend it several times in a row, they will never see the exact same show; the structure will be the same, but there will be variations in the staging or in the single performances of the actors. The emotional response of the audience will be immediate and tied to that specific experience too. A painting, a sculpture, or a movie, even, stays the same. Time does not alter it. What changes is our emotional response to it, according to our personal emotional and life journey. Van Gogh's *Starry Night* doesn't change. What we see in it and our reaction to it changes in time.

Aside from its artistic nature, theatre requires technique. Talent alone won't help the actor if he is not able to project his voice and be heard. Sets need to be built as well as costumes. As a result, there is a **craft** side to theatre too! Certain theatrical mediums require specific abilities, and those abilities need to be developed and trained: actors study voice, diction, and movement; scenic designers learn perspective, painting techniques, materials, and color schemes; and costume designers learn costume construction, fabrics, and color palettes.

Most famous actors you see in blockbuster movies have dedicated their entire lives to their art and perfected their craft through years of training! Meryl Streep is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama, Bradley Cooper graduated from the Actor's Studio and so did Al Pacino… just to name a few. Even improvisational theatre has a structure and rules, so it requires training in specific abilities.

When you see a theatrical production, you experience the culmination of a complex and long process—you see the proverbial tip of the iceberg. On the one hand, that is exactly what you should see. Yet, you shouldn't assume it is all that there is. Costumes and sets don't just magically appear on opening night and actors don't just naturally and effortlessly speak all of those lines in that specific order and in that specific way on the day you are in the audience.

A Bit of History

Since the Greeks, theatre has been perceived to be educational while also providing a form of entertainment. Two of the most influential classic Greek philosophers had very strong—and opposing—ideas about the role of theatre in the education of the people and in society: they are Plato (428-348 B.C) and Aristotle (384-333 B.C). Let's see the differences between the two schools of thought.

According to **Plato**, the world we live in is a mere representation, a copy, or ***mimesis***, of the perfect world, which is the world of ideas. What corrupts our world and makes it imperfect is the fact that it is made of substance, which decays. We ourselves suffer the same flaw. The idea of a human being is perfect, while the incarnation of it is not. Our flesh and bones weigh us down; they make us age, suffer, become sick and eventually die. The truth, the beauty, lies in the idea, in the concept, and if we want to get closer to it we need to see beyond materialism.

Plato said theatre presents the audience with a representation of reality, so if reality itself is a representation of the essence (of the truth), theatre becomes the representation of a representation. The copy of a copy. This is why Plato

thought theatre corrupted the people rather than providing an educational instrument.

Plato's disciple had the opposite approach. **Aristotle** thought theatre was very important in shaping the minds and character of the people. He said theatre allowed people to see the representation of an action followed by its consequences. Additionally, through a process called ***catharsis***, the audience would emotionally empathize with the characters undergoing the action on stage to the point of identifying with them. With the resolution of the dramatic action, the audience would feel emotionally purged and gain a better understanding of what is right and what is wrong.

At the same time, Aristotle said that in order to be effective, theatre must also offer a component of spectacle and entertainment to keep the audience engaged and motivated. It is important to note that the only theatrical genre that Aristotle considered in his analysis was the tragedy. He didn't approve of comedy as he didn't believe it had an educational value.

Theatre Today

Today it is safe to say that theatre both educates and entertains. Some plays are heavier on meaning, others on the spectacle, but it is very unusual to walk out of a theatre performance without feeling somehow different from when you walked in.

Interestingly, theatre and psychology frequently cross over. Theatre investigates the psyche of human nature to represent it, while psychology investigates it to understand its dynamics and possibly correct unhealthy behaviors. Therapists can use theatrical exercises to unlock behaviors or to expose the core of an issue through **Drama Therapy**. By allowing the participants to shift their focus from themselves to a character or situation, they create an alter ego upon which they can transfer their experiences. It becomes a form of externalization, where the participants are able to distance themselves from the issue, see it for what it is, and go from there. Clearly, Drama Therapy requires very thorough and specific training and sees theatre

professionals and therapists working and training together, making it far from any acting class you can take.

How does theatre work? How does it create meaning and connect with people?

To start off, as the audience approaches the performance, they are aware that they will witness something that is being created live in front of their eyes and that will present them with circumstances and characters that are fictional. Yet, as the show begins, the audience is willing to **suspend their disbelief,** or believe in the truthfulness of what they witness for the duration of the performance. This is a convention that is established between the actors and the audience. If the performance is good, the convention will never be broken.

In addition, theatre relies on **metaphors** and **allegories** to elevate a subjective, specific situation to its universal abstraction. Both metaphors and allegories are ways to endow narratives with deeper meaning, usually relating ethics, politics or social issues. While a metaphor is mostly related to language and associates words that usually don't go together ("All the world's a stage"... from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*) , allegories rely on a tale, a fable or a story that reads straight forward and simple on the surface, but that hides a deeper meaning. A good example of a play in the form of an allegory is Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. On the surface, the play tells the story of the witch hunt that took place in 1692 in Salem (MA). In reality, the play is Miller's commentary on McCarthysm, which is known as the political repression and, at times, persecution of individuals who were suspected of communist ideals during the 1940s and 1950s. Similarly, Shakespeare's main characters in *Romeo and Juliet* become the symbol of ill-fated love and represent young lovers of all times.

In some cases, the meaning can be tied to a specific period in history, and as time passes its lesson might become less poignant or apparent. This is the case for some of Shakespeare's plays, as he was often commenting on the society of his time, which modern audiences might not necessarily know much about. This kind of social commentary is even more evident in plays that respond to the experiences of a certain time period, such as those by playwrights like Ionesco, Genet, and Beckett who wrote about the shock and psychological void left behind by the horrors of the second world war.

Sociopolitical Background

Theatre can become a form of political commentary, too. In many circumstances, playwrights and theatre artists have used theatre to directly or indirectly expose the wrongdoings of a political regime—at times risking or even losing their own lives or being persecuted, exiled, or censured. Unfortunately, examples abound.

After criticizing the newly formed Soviet government, Vsevolod Meyerhold, the director of the Moscow Art Theatre and one of the most influential theatre artists of the 20th century, was arrested and tortured for days. He broke down and "confessed" to being a spy. He was then sentenced to death by a firing squad. In a letter that was made public after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, he writes:

> "The investigators began to use force on me, a sick 65-year-old man. I was made to lie face down and beaten on the soles of my feet and my spine with a rubber strap. They sat me on a chair and beat my feet from above, with considerable force… For the next few days, when those parts of my legs were covered with extensive internal hemorrhaging, they again beat the red-blue-and-yellow bruises with the strap and the pain was so intense that it felt as if boiling water was being poured on these sensitive areas. I howled and wept from the pain. They beat my back with the same rubber strap and punched my face, swinging their fists from a great height … The intolerable physical and emotional pain caused my eyes to weep unending streams of tears. Lying face down on the floor, I discovered that I could wriggle, twist and squeal like a dog when its master whips it … When I lay down on the cot and fell asleep, after 18 hours of interrogation, in order to go back in an hour's time for more, I was woken up by my own groaning and because I was jerking about like a patient in the last stages of typhoid fever … 'death, oh most certainly, death is easier than this!' the interrogated person says to himself. I began to incriminate myself in the hope that this, at least, would lead quickly to the scaffold.[3]"

More recently, Iranian playwright Nassim Soleimanpour used his play *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* as a metaphor for the condition of artists—and of young,

literate people—in his country. The author was not allowed to travel outside his country and was closely watched over by the government. To let his voice be heard, in 2011 he wrote the play and sent it to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland, the Summerwork Festival in Toronto, the Bytom Festival in Poland, and the Speltheater Holland in the Netherlands. Per his specific request, the play should not be rehearsed at all. The manuscript should be given to the actor on the same night of the performance, right in front of the audience, and the actor must be completely unaware of the content of the play so that he discovers it as he cold reads it to the audience. With masterful writing and a subtle but clear game of manipulation, Soleimanpour is able to let the actor and the audience experience firsthand the restrictions and confusion that he, and artists like him, go through on an everyday basis. The play achieved enormous success and is still wildly produced. It eventually allowed Soleimanpour to have enough leverage to be let out of Iran and freely exercise his art.

In the U.S.A., there are several examples of plays and playwrights using theatre to establish a clear political position. Think, for example, of the musical *Hair*. It was written by James Rado and Gerome Ragni (with music by Galt MacDermot) in 1967 to criticize American participation in the Vietnam War. Arthur Miller used his play *The Crucible* (1953) as a metaphor to criticize McCarthyism.

Nowadays, theatre is once again trying to stand the test of time and respond to the needs of the current society. In the U.S.A., the issues of race, identity, and inclusivity are now prominently represented on the national stage, providing food for thought and visibility to minorities and the gender-fluid community. Plays such as the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, *Fairview*, by Jackie Sibblies Drury, portray racial dynamics and their social perceptions in a unique and complex way; Larissa FastHorse's *The Thanksgiving Play* (2015) is a shocking investigation of the underlying cultural appropriation and the mishandling of cultural heritage; Tracy Letts' *The Minutes* (2017) deals with the hypocrisy of a small community and its attempt at manipulating and reinventing their troubled past; Martyna Majok's plays, such as *Ironbound*, *The Cost of Living* (also Pulitzer Prize for Drama) and *Sanctuary City* give voice to illegal immigrants and to the differently abled. A recent original musical, *A Strange Loop* (Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2020), written by Michael R. Jackson, calls for an exclusively

LGBTQ+ and BIPOC cast and gives voice to those who struggle to “fit in” in a deeply prejudiced society.

American Theatre

What kinds of theatres can we find in the U.S.? The biggest distinction in all theatres and theatre companies that operate in the U.S. is between **Professional Theatre** and **Amateur Theatre**.

Professional Theatre

We have professional theatre if the production is conceived, developed, and staged by professionals in the field— that is to say, artists that belong to guilds and that are compensated for their work. Actors, directors, designers, and crew members all have their own associations granting them legal representation and negotiating contracts, wages, and benefits.

Commercial Theatre is an example of professional theatre. In this case, the producers’ goal when developing a commercial show is to make a profit. This doesn’t mean that the quality of the purely artistic side of the production suffers, but it simply puts more emphasis on the economic side of the equation. Market research and marketing strategies become vital to the opening and running of a show, and a lot of time is spent looking for investors (who ultimately expect to see a good return for their money).

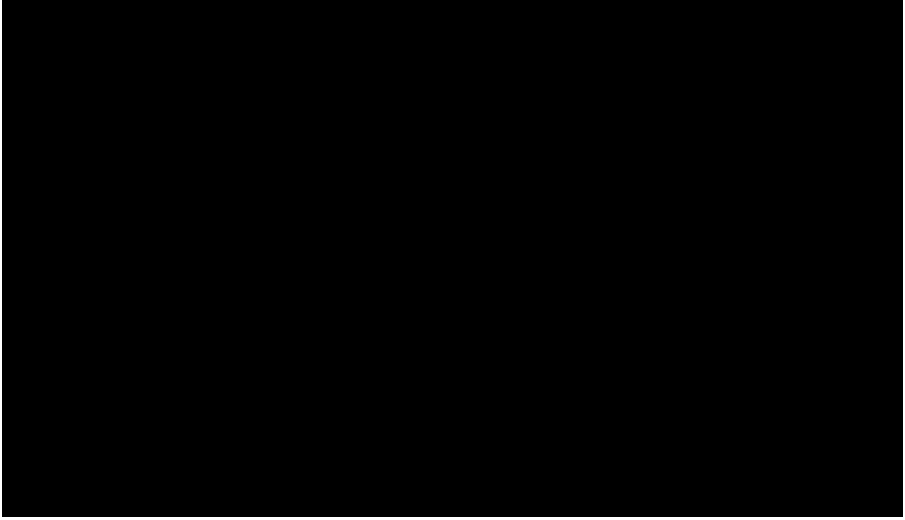
The most famous incarnations of commercial theatre are **Broadway** and off-Broadway theatres. New York is where we can probably find the most commercial theatre in the entire U.S., given that it hosts 41 Broadway theatres and countless off-Broadway ones. It is important to understand that commercial theatre, in particular Broadway theatre, is extremely expensive to create. The funds that need to be raised to ensure the smooth run of a production are easily in the millions. Therefore, stakes are very high on the investors’ side. It also takes a long time before the investment pays back. It has

been calculated that in order for a production to break even on Broadway, it needs to run with sold-out houses for at least three consecutive years… which is a lot!

At the same time, commercial theatre heavily contributes to the economy of a city. The whole micro-economy of the theatre district in New York City directly depends on shows. Hotels, restaurants, bars, souvenir shops, street carts, and cabs all thrive on the audiences of the theatres. In fact, when Broadway was dark during the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire neighborhood looked like a ghost town, with many going out of business.

To multiply their chances at a profit, most Broadway shows tour the U.S., bringing the show to new and local audiences. Merchandise plays a huge role as well, providing almost the higher margin of the production's profit. You might have noticed if you went to see *Wicked*, *The Lion King*, or *The Phantom of the Opera* that a cotton t-shirt with the show's logo can cost you up to $50.

BROADWAY



Another kind of professional theatre is represented by **Regional Theatres** (also called **Repertory Theatres**). Regional theatres are located all over the U.S., including New York City, and produce their own season of shows, at times having their own resident company of "creatives," actors included. They tend to have several performance spaces in order to fit each individual production. There is usually a main stage, which is a larger venue used for bigger productions, and then a smaller space for staged readings, workshops, or rehearsals.

Regional theatres are headed by an Artistic Director, who is in charge of selecting the productions for each season and of developing all the artistic projects related to the theatre activity. Usually, the Artistic Director is sided by an Executive Director or Managing Director who helps and sorts out the financial side of the operations, applies for grants, and builds budgets.

Regional theatres gravitate towards producing both classics and new plays, or plays with themes more challenging than what you would normally find on Broadway. Regional theatres are at times the spin-off venue for shows that will later transfer to Broadway, so producers can test the waters to see how the audience and the critics receive the show. Most recently, there are several shows on Broadway that originally premiered in a Regional Theatre, including *Moulin Rouge!*, *Kinky Boots*, *Memphis*, and *Come From Away*.

Regional theatres can function as nonprofit or for-profit establishments. Regional theatres rely on season ticket sales more than on single ticket sales and aim at developing, or at least maintaining, the number of their subscribers,

as that would allow them the necessary flow of cash at the beginning of the season to produce their shows. Regional Theatres usually promote several fundraising events and actively pursue donations, grants, and national funds—mostly available through the National Endowment for the Arts. Most regional theatres in America are part of **LORT, the League Of Resident Theatres**, an association that collectively represents the theatres when negotiating contracts with the individual guilds.

Some of the most notable regional theatres include Yale Repertory Theatre, Berkley Repertory Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Roundabout Theatre Company, Second Stage Theater, Actors Theatre of Louisville, American Repertory Theatre ART, The Goodman Theatre, the Guthrie Theater, and Manhattan Theatre Club.

Amateur Theatre

Amateur theatre is nonprofessional theatre, which doesn't mean that its quality is any less than what you might see on a professional stage. Everyone working in such a theatre is driven by passion, as they earn income from another job.

Community theatres all around the U.S. are a perfect example of amateur theatre. These are nonprofit institutions that, as the name suggests, revolve around a community and its activity. They might have full-time staff, but most likely they rely on volunteers. At times, they use spaces that belong to the community, while at times they own their own theatre. Community theatre also has its own national association, the **American Association of Community Theatre**, which aims to provide support and opportunities for its members.

College theatre is another example of amateur theatre, as it produces shows mostly by students. Regardless of whether the students' theatre professors belong to guilds, they serve the production as educators, not professionals, meaning the professors get paid to teach, not to perform, direct, or design. College theatre has proved to be the incubator of a later successful production, like Lin Manuel Miranda's *In The Heights*, which premiered in its original draft at Wesleyan University in 1999.

Superstitions in Theatre

[redacted]

KEY WORDS

Allegories

Amateur Theatre

American Association of Community Theatres

Aristotle

Broadway / Off-Broadway

Catharsis

College Theatre

Commercial Theatre

Community Theatre

Drama Therapy

Liberal Arts

LORT

Metaphors

Mimesis

Plato

Professional Theatre

Regional Theatre/Repertory Theatre

Suspension of Disbelief

Theatre as Art

Theatre as Craft

1 T https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/10/141016165953.htm
2 Historically, the Liberal Arts concept of education comes from Classic Greek Philosophy, while the term "Ars Liberali"s (free practices), is Latin and it means practices worthy to be learned by free people. Liberal Arts stands for the pursuit of an education that has a broader insight.
3 Shentalinsky, Vitaly (1995). The KGB's Literary Archive. Harvill: John Crowfoot. pp. 25–26. ISBN 1-86046-072-0.

2 Theatrical Spaces

Kiara Pipino

This chapter will introduce you to the physical space "where it happens," just to quote the famous musical *Hamilton*.

A Little History

Western theatre is said to have originated in Ancient Greece around 700 B.C.—a long, long time ago. The Greeks considered theatre an extremely valuable part of their lives as citizens and members of the community. Theatrical activities were tied to the cult of the god Dionysus and theatres were located near the temple honoring him. The term "theatre" itself comes from the Greek **"*theatron*",** which means "a place of seeing."

Ground plan of a Green Theatre. Drawing by Kelsey Etienne.

The Greeks preferred to use the natural disposition and geography of the land when building. For example, the *acropolis*[1]—the sacred part of town housing all the temples—was located on top of a hill, overlooking the valley and the sea. That gave them the advantage of seeing an approaching enemy and gave them time to prepare the defense. Since the theatre was a temple (the temple of Dionysus), it was likewise situated on the top of the hill. The theatre's construction utilized the downward slope of the hill—called ***koilon***—as the seating area for the audience. At the bottom of the hill, there would be a round paved area called the *orchestra*, which was where the dancers would perform. In the middle of the *orchestra*, there would be an altar where they sacrificed a goat, marking the beginning of the rituals and of the theatrical activity. Behind the *orchestra* was the stage and a small, fairly simple building with three doors called the ***skene***. The door at the center was bigger, while the two side doors were smaller. Each door would have a specific meaning; for example, the central door would be the one utilized by the king, or the main characters. The

side doors were for messengers, or secondary characters coming from outside the city. The roof of the *skene* was flat and allowed actors to use it as an upper level, mostly representing the appearances of the gods.

Ancient Greek theatre at Segesta (Italy). Photo by Kiara Pipino.

Very little remains of the classic Greek theatre buildings, as most of them have evolved in time, and others were ransacked or destroyed. All we know comes from drawings of Roman scholars, such as Vitruvius. Information about the use of masks and props comes from parts of the *Onomasticon*, written by Greek scholar Pollux around 170 A.D.

These sources illustrate a few theatrical machineries as well, such as a trap door, allowing the actors to appear and disappear from the roof of the *skene*. This was utilized as a "special effect," or *Deus-Ex-Machina* (literally: "God out of the machine"). In Sophocles' *Medea*, the title character flies away on the chariot of the sun at the end of the play. While the exact way this was achieved is far from being clear, it is likely that it happened from the top of the *skene*. Other theatrical machinery included the *periaktoi*, triangular prisms with different decorations on each side that could rotate and provide a new design frame for the scene, and the *enkiklema*, a platform on wheels that could jet out on stage from the central door of the *skene*.

Image of a typical Roman Theatre. Drawing by Kelsey Etienne.

Differently from the Greeks, the Romans' main structural element was the arch and its extension in space, generating the vault. This is one of the strongest and most durable building structures, and in fact, many Roman buildings still stand despite the test of time and the impact of many wars. (The Romans also invented concrete, another durable construction element). The arch structure allowed the Romans to build upwards rather than sideways and their buildings tend to be much taller and with several more floors compared to the Greek ones. This is also true when it comes to the theatre structure, which was built up as a fully enclosed space, with the audience accessing the many levels through stairs and tunnels. The stage area and its building became more of a monumental space.

Take a moment to compare the elevation of the architecture of the Greek and Roman theatres depicted in the photos of this chapter.

View of the Roman Theatre in Orange (France). "Roman theatre at Orange | wide view" by FlickrDelusions is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Later on in history, during the Renaissance, we see the rise of new theatrical spaces such as the Elizabethan Theatre—Shakespeare's theatre—and the Olympic Theatre in Vicenza, Italy.

The **Elizabethan theatre** was a polyhedric building, mostly made of wood, that featured a wide circular and uncovered courtyard where the audience would stand. The stage jutted into the courtyard and would be covered with a wooden roof. There would be one or two levels of balconies for those audience members who preferred to sit (and paid a pricier ticket for it).

It was not unusual for Elizabethan theatres to burn to the ground, as they were mostly made of wood and straw and they used torches with open flames for lighting purposes.

The Globe Theatre in London. "Globe Theatre, London, England" by n_willsey is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

All public Elizabethan theatres in London were outside city limits—on the left side of the River Thames—because theatrical activities were illegal in town at the time. Theatres were also usually located close to pubs, if not attached to one. It was normal for audience members to walk in and out of a performance to fetch a beer or something to eat. Talking during performances was also common, and that is why so many plays of the time (Shakespeare's included) were so long and featured so much repetition: they needed to make sure that the audience wouldn't miss important information so they repeated it several times.

The modern **Globe Theatre** in London is an example of an Elizabethan theatre. It was designed and built according to historical documents, although it meets today's safety standards and features all the necessary modern technology.

The stage of Globe Theatre in London.
"The Globe Theatre" by simpologist is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

In the U.S., there are a couple of reconstructions of Elizabethan theatre. One is the Rose Theatre in Michigan. The American Shakespeare Center in Virginia features a reproduction of the Blackfriars Theatre, which was a private theatrical space of the same age.

The Olympic Theatre in Vicenza was designed by the world-famous Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio in 1580. The building was completed with painted fixed scenery by Vincenzo Scamozzi in 1585, after Palladio's death. It was inaugurated on March 3, 1585, with a production of Sophocles' *Oedipus The King*.

This theatre is known as the oldest covered theatre still in existence. The building has clear references to Classic architecture in style and features exquisite painted panels on stage, giving the illusion of greater depth. The painting technique provides perspective and functions as a *Trompe-l'Oeil*.

A *Trompe l'Oeil*, translated literally from the French as "trick the eye" is a large scale drawing that is conceived and realized to provide the illusion of a space that isn't actually there. It works by using perspective, a drawing technique that succeeds at faking depth on a two-dimensional surface.

Olympic Theatre in Vicenza, view of the stage.

Site-Specific or Environmental Theatre

We mentioned in Chapter 1 that in order to have theatre all you really need is an actor telling a story and an audience listening to it. Clearly, the actor and the audience occupy a space.

Sometimes the space they occupy might be on the same level (with no stage). Think about street theatre: you have probably seen a performer, like a mime or

a clown, working on the streets amongst groups of passersby. New York has several of them working in Times Square, for example. Performers, or producers, can find a place to use in a theatrical way. Sometimes those places are what we call "found spaces," such as streets, squares, or urban environments.

Sometimes, however, the actor and audience might be utilizing spaces that were originally conceived for a non-theatrical function and have been converted to performance spaces. We call theatrical performances that use those kinds of spaces **site-specific theatre** or **environmental theatre**. Think of all of the "Shakespeare in the Park" festivals that happen all around the U.S. in the summer! Their theatre spaces are parks, which they adapt to facilitate theatrical productions.

Environmental theatre has become quite popular in recent years, partly because of the large number of abandoned spaces and buildings that could use repurposing in large cities around the world.

A great example of a site-specific theatre is the McKittrick Hotel in New York. The building was completed in 1939 as a luxurious five-star hotel. Yet, the hotel had a very short history, as the building was soon condemned and then abandoned. In 2011, two theatre companies teamed up and re-opened it as the location for the site-specific production of *Sleep No More*, a show loosely based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Since then, the building has been hosting theatrical productions and other performative events. In *Sleep No More*, the audience is let into the building in batches, they are given a white mask and are instructed about how to navigate the production. When they start their experience, the audience can go anywhere they like in the building and follow the performers they prefer. The white masks distinguish the audience from the performers. The building has several floors, and all the rooms are accessible to the audience and to the performers. At times, the performers call for audience participation. All the action is based on movement, and no text is ever spoken, making the experience available for a large audience. Eventually, all the performers converge in a large banquet hall, which is where the show comes to its spectacular conclusion. In a show like this, the audience is entitled to "build" their own experience and theatrical narrative. You can attend such a show many times and have a different experience every time.

Chicago offers another good example of site-specific theatre in the U.S. Right

in the middle of the Magnificent Mile, the old 1869 Water Tower has become the home of the Lookingglass Theatre Company. The building had to be renovated and brought back up to code to allow it to be open to the public and support theatrical activities, but the iconic look and original features of the architecture have been preserved, with the theatre company working around—or with—the space in their productions.

In Europe, site-specific theatre often happens in the archaeological remains of ancient Greek and Roman structures or Medieval complexes. For example, in the Sicilian town of Siracusa, Italy, during the months of May and June, the 5th century Greek theatre becomes the stage for an important classic theatre festival, which produces two classic Greek tragedies and one classic Greek comedy.

Greek Theatre of Siracusa (Italy). Photo by Kiara Pipino.

In Verona, the famous Arena is utilized for concerts and operas during the summer. The image below shows a production of Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Aida* at the Arena.

"Verdi Aïda in the Arena (Verona, Italy 2015)" by paularps is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Spaces Designed for Theatre

It is time now to discuss structures that were originally conceived and built as theatrical spaces.

The Proscenium Stage

Ground plan of a Proscenium Stage. Drawing by Kiara Pipino.

The most popular theatrical space is probably the **proscenium theatre**. If you have ever been to the theatre in your life, the odds of your being in a proscenium-style theatre are quite high. In a proscenium theatre, the stage directly faces the audience. As the building is conceived exclusively for theatrical performances, there is a distinct division between the spaces that are accessible to the audience from the spaces that serve the production itself.

The audience enters the building, and usually, there is a lobby with a ticket office, a cloak room of some sort, restrooms, and at times a cafeteria or a bar. The lobby gives access to the house, which can be arranged in several ways. You can have a main floor with seats arranged in rows right in front of the stage, and then you can have several other levels, like a Mezzanine and a Balcony, that can be accessed with stairs from the lobby. Usually, Mezzanine and Balcony tickets tend to be cheaper than the main floor (the stalls).

Elements of Proscenium Theatre

Teatro La Fenice, Venice. Photo by Kiara Pipino.

When it comes to the space dedicated to performances, the proscenium theatre highlights the division between actors and the audience. The stage is framed with a **proscenium arch** that creates the window, or frame, through which the audience experiences the production. That frame generates what is also known as the **fourth wall**. When we talk about actors “breaking the fourth wall”, we mean that during the production the actors directly address the audience, breaking the illusion of separation between what is happening on stage and the “real” world.

Above the stage, there is a **fly loft**, which is a technical space that allows scenery and lights to be lifted in and out of the sight of the audience. In modern theatres, everything can be motorized so that if a backdrop needs to be lifted, all they need to do is to push a button. Other times theatres still have the traditional **mechanic fly system**, where all lifts need to be manually operated.

Wing space is available on both sides of the stage to give the actors multiple ways of entering and exiting the stage and, once again, to allow scenery to be moved out of the way. Ideally, the wings should provide a space as wide as half of the length of the stage, while the fly loft should be twice as tall as the proscenium arch to allow backdrops to fly out without any folding.

In order to facilitate the visibility of the performance for the audience, the stage in a proscenium theatre is usually slightly raked (sloped). The audience space is also raked, which allows seats in rows further away from the stage to have less obstructed views.

Other technical spaces in a proscenium theatre include a **Green Room**, which is a space close to the stage but isolated from it, where the actors can gather in between scenes (and yes, most of the time the Green Room is painted green). Actors also need dressing rooms, which are generally located backstage on lower levels. Some theatres have laundry rooms, as well as a costume and a scene shop.

A very important technical space is the **booth**, which is where the stage manager and other technicians stay during a performance to operate the technical elements and run the show. Because of the nature of what needs to be done, the booth must have a clear view of the stage. Nowadays, this can be achieved by way of video cameras if needed, although it is still quite common to see the booth at the back of the theatre, or stationed in one of the audience booths.

Italian-Style Theatre

A particular form of proscenium theatre features several booths surrounding

the main floor at different levels. This kind of theatre space tends to be very ornate and opulent, and it is also called **Italian-style theatre**, as it was designed in Italy during the Renaissance. Most Broadway theatres fall into this category.

These buildings were conceived to accommodate the needs of a production and to provide spectacle by way of using machinery that allowed seamless scene changes. They clearly separated the audience from the stage and had comfortable and varied seating for the audience: booths for the wealthier, stalls for the middle class, and a standing balcony area for the commoners. Most cities in Europe had at least one of these theatres. The seating capabilities, the richness of the decor, and the dimensions of the stage soon became elements that not only spoke of the relevance of the theatre itself, but also of the power and status of the city. The theatre soon became a place to be seen, aside from a place to go see something.

Fun Fact: Italian-Style Theatre

While Italian-style theatres originally accommodated opera performances, nowadays they often are used for musicals. In order to efficiently do so, it needs a space for the orchestra which is usually located below the stage, between the proscenium arch and the audience. We call that space the **orchestra pit**.

The invention of the orchestra pit is attributed to the German composer Richard Wagner, who had the first theatre with it built in his hometown of Beyreuth. What led Wagner to conceive the orchestra pit was the intention of

fully separating the magic of the performance from what made it happen. Basically, he didn't want the audience to see the musicians as he wanted the music to "magically" support the action on stage. Also, lowering the orchestra from the stage and distancing it from the performers diminished the competition between the actors' voices and the music coming from the instruments.

The orchestra pit is only utilized when needed, therefore during straight plays, it is usually covered and becomes extra playing space for the actors. The part of the stage extending out of the proscenium arch towards the audience (the covered orchestra pit) is called the **apron**.

Model of the Garnier Opera House, Paris. You can see the fly loft over the stage on the left, and the house with the stalls on the right. Photo by Kiara Pipino

Theatrical Complexes

When we think of massive theatre complexes, such as the National Theatre in London or the Lincoln Center in New York, we can see how these structures have been conceived to accommodate all possible needs coming from performances and therefore have several dedicated spaces beyond the actual playhouse.

The Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, for example, includes the Metropolitan Opera House (a 3,900-seat proscenium theatre), a 2,738-seat symphony hall, the David Koch theatre (a 2,586-seat proscenium theatre), the Vivian Beaumont Theatre (a 1,090-seat theatre), the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theatre (a smaller 299-seat theatre), the Clark Studio Theatre (a 120-seat dance theatre), several movie theatres, the New York City Library for the Performing Arts, several rehearsal spaces, and the Julliard School for the Performing Arts.

Map of Lincoln Center.

The Thrust Stage

Ground Plan of a Thrust Stage. Drawing by Kiara Pipino.

Another theatrical space that is very popular is the **thrust stage**. For the most part, thrust stage theatres call for more intimate and less technically demanding design-heavy productions. They also tend to be smaller venues, with fewer seats in the house.

In a thrust theatre, the stage extends itself into the audience, so if an actor is standing in the middle of the stage, the audience is sitting on the actor's right and left sides as well as in front.

Acting on a thrust stage requires different abilities of the actors. In a proscenium stage, the actors need to keep in mind that the audience is facing them, so unless they intentionally turn their backs to the audience, they can maintain an unobstructed view of the audience, and vice versa. In a thrust stage, with the audience arranged on three sides of the stage, there will be times when the actors have their backs to the audience. It simply cannot be avoided. In order to minimize this issue, the director and the actors have to "block" the show in a more dynamic way. The entrances and exits of the actors can happen from the back of the theatre or directly from the aisles of the audience seating.

View of a Thrust Stage. Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis.

A thrust stage also doesn't allow much of a fourth wall, as there is no proscenium arch and no fly loft. The same can be said for the technical spaces, which are usually in sight so the audience can be aware of what is making everything happen. In short, while on a proscenium stage it is possible to create a complete illusion of a different reality—hiding all the technical elements of a production and letting the audience only see what is happening on stage—the thrust stage shows the production in all of its elements, including the technical ones.

These theatres do not have an orchestra pit, so in case of need, the orchestra

must be accommodated either on stage or someplace else off stage. As for the other technical spaces, such as dressing rooms, the green room, and wing space, they are still present in thrust theatres along with the areas dedicated to the audience (restrooms, lobby, ticket office, etc.).

Historically, the Elizabethan theatre is a thrust stage. Shakespeare's own theatre, The Globe, well represents this kind of space. The building was somewhat circular in its ground plan, with a structure that functioned as the backstage area on one side and a wooden stage extending from it into an un-roofed courtyard, where the audience would stand; this was called the orchestra. All around the orchestra, there were two levels of balconies with wooden seats. Those seats were more expensive since there was a roof on top of them!

The Arena Stage, or Theatre-In-The-Round

Ground Plan of an Arena Stage. Drawing by Kiara Pipino.

The third kind of theatrical space is the theatre-in-the-round, or **arena-style theatre**. In this case, the stage is in the middle of the house, with the audience surrounding it on all sides.

The origins of this kind of space date way back in history and speak of theatre's past just as much as of other events. If we take a quick look at the Romans, we learn how ingenious architects and urban planners they were. Everywhere in Europe, Asia Minor, and North Africa, we find remnants of Roman bridges, roads, aqueducts, and all sorts of buildings, including theatres and amphitheaters. Many of these structures are still perfectly functional today—bridges and roads in particular—while buildings have undergone sometimes massive reconfigurations and renovations, or have been stripped of their parts and material during the Middle Ages (mostly to build churches).

One of the most famous Roman buildings of all time that still stands today is the Colosseum, which is the perfect example of an amphitheater[2], or theatre-in-the-round. The Colosseum was built in 80 A.D. under the supervision of Emperor Tito Flavio Vespasiano. It is estimated to have had an audience

capacity of anywhere between 50,000 and 70,000 people, which would be sitting or standing in the five different levels of stalls. The action, mostly "games," would happen in the arena and usually entailed fights between gladiators, races with horses or chariots, fights between men and wild animals, and *naumachiae* (fights between boats). The entire arena could be transformed into an enclosed pond. As you can see, the Colosseum itself was never conceived or utilized as a theatrical space. Romans had specific theatre buildings as well, although the kind of theatrical performances they produced didn't really require much of a dedicated space. What was most important for the Romans was the grandeur via the opulent look of the architecture. That was how they impressed the people they colonized and showcased their power.

In modern days, the arena stage has become a theatrical space. It is considered the most challenging space by actors, directors, and designers alike—mostly because everything really happens in plain sight. There is no way of hiding anything or of getting something—or someone—on and off stage without passing through the audience or without the audience seeing it. This kind of stage doesn't really allow big scene changes or even big pieces of scenery, as they would inevitably block some considerable part of the audience from seeing the action. Acting-wise, the arena calls for an even more dynamic staging on the part of the actors and the director, as this is another space where actors would be at any point giving their backs to some section of the audience. The theatre-in-the-round is utilized most successfully for small, intimate productions or for shows that rely on dialogue rather than spectacle.

Seating Chart of the Fichandler Stage, part of the Arena Stage complex in Washington D.C. Image from https://www.arenastage.org/globalassets/rentals/important-information/fichandler-seating.pdf.

The Black Box Theatre

Finally, let's talk about the **Black Box Theatre**. This space is the smallest theatrical space, but is the most flexible of all. The Black Box is usually a wide-open rectangular space that is painted black and is fully equipped to function with every possible configuration of audience seating and stage. A Black Box theatre can be arranged as a proscenium theatre, a thrust theatre, an arena, or

many other configurations, according to the needs of the production. Similarly to the two previous theatrical spaces, the Black Box does not allow the technical elements to be concealed from the audience's view, and given the size of the space itself, it is best utilized when producing small, intimate shows. This space allows close proximity between the actors and the audience, creating a very unique experience. Many theatres around the country have a Black Box Theatre alongside a bigger venue or main stage. At times, the Black Box is utilized as a rehearsal space or dedicated space for staged readings and smaller productions. Universities, for example, tend to have two theatrical spaces, one of them being a Black Box.

Example of a Black Box Theatre. SUNY Oneonta Hamblin Theatre. Photo by Matthew Grenier.

Blocking and Stage Positions

Blocking is all of the planned movement and positions of the actors on stage during a performance. The blocking depends on the script, the stage configuration, and on the artistic decisions of both the actors and the director.

When discussing stage positions on a proscenium or a thrust stage, the following convention is adopted: imagine an actor standing center stage, his back to the back of the stage, facing the audience. If we want the actor to come closer to the audience, we tell the actor to come *downstage*. If we want the actor to be further away from the audience, we tell him to walk *upstage*. Left and right are determined according to the position of the actor, who is facing the audience and has his back to the back of the theatre. If we tell the actor to cross Downstage Right, the actor will walk downstage (towards the audience) and to his right.

If we are in an arena stage, it is up to the director and the actors to agree on where is upstage. When that is determined, blocking goes from there.

Blocking and stage positions. Drawing by Kiara Pipino.

KEY WORDS

Antagonist

Apron

Arena Stage

Aristotle and his elements of script analysis

Black Box

Blocking and blocking positions

Booth

Elizabethan Theatre

Fourth Wall

Globe Theatre

Green Room

Italian-style Theatre

Koilon

Mechanic Fly System

Olympic Theatre

Orchestra Pit

Proscenium Stage (with its elements)

Proscenium Arch

Site Specific/Environmental Theatre

Skene

Theatron

Thrust Stage

Wing Space

1 Acropolis, from Greek : High City.
2 The term “amphitheater” comes from Latin. With “amphi” meaning double, and amphitheater doubles the size of the “regular” theatre stage, making it circular instead of semi-circular.

3 How to Read a Play and Watch a Production

Kiara Pipino

You are likely familiar with reading a novel, a short story, an article, or many other forms of narratives. Plays are a different beast, and unless you are in the theatre business, the chances of you reading a play are rather small. Unlike any other form of fiction, plays are exclusively written through dialogue (what the characters say) and stage directions.

Reading Stage Directions

In a written play, you won't find paragraphs that describe how the characters feel or what the characters see. Instead, there are stage directions, which deal with what needs to happen on stage or with what the stage/characters look like or do.

Stage directions are useful to the director, the actors, and the designers to understand the mechanics of the performance: where is the scenic design? What does the space look like? Where do the characters enter from? Where do they exit? They also provide information about what needs to happen outside of the dialogue, such as a sound—a doorbell or a telephone ringing.

The way stage directions are written is visually different from the dialogue. Usually, they are italicized and separated from the dialogue.

It is important to understand whether the stage directions have been written by the playwright or if they just relate to the original production of the play. In the first case, it is important to follow them as they represent the will of the playwright, while if they are just a report of what happened in a previous production, they can be discarded. Either way, they are never read out loud on stage! Famous American playwrights Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller are famous for writing very specific stage directions.

Identifying Characters: Who Are They?

Every play has a **protagonist**. The protagonist is the character who carries the story and pushes it forward. It is the character who changes the most during the course of the play. In the case of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, they are both protagonists but actually function as one (as they are a couple). Some actors will consider the protagonist the character with the most lines, but while that might often be the case, it is not the correct definition. There are, in fact, cases in which the character with the most lines is a supporting character, for example in the case of a play with a narrator—like Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*— or in Shakespeare's *Othello*, in which the character who has the most lines isn't the title role. The protagonist is the character who needs to solve the main conflict and overcome the main obstacle.

In all classic Greek theatre the Greek hero—the protagonist—is ALWAYS a male character. As a matter of fact, women were not allowed to perform at the time and female characters were played by men wearing masks.

The embodiment of the obstacle is called the **antagonist**. Now, while the protagonist is ALWAYS a character in the play, the antagonist can be a character or something else, like a disease, society, a concept, or a fear. To understand who the antagonist is, the best way is to focus on what or who the protagonist needs to overcome in order to achieve what he or she wants. Supporting characters, while they don't have the status of the protagonist, are all important as they help the story move on and provide vital information for the audience.

Script Analysis

When reading a play, it is important to identify its structure to better understand the play's message and the actions of the characters. Script analysis is the first step for every actor and director when approaching a play. What are we are looking for in a script analysis?

A play begins when something happens that breaks the stasis, the routine of everyday life. This is called **initial event,** or **inciting incident**. The whole trajectory of the play aims to restore the stasis and solve whatever conflict was caused or ignited by the initial event. Keep in mind that the initial event might not necessarily be at the beginning of the play. It might have happened before the play even began. For example, in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the initial event is tied to the feud between two families, which was ignited by something before the play starts. That is what prevents Romeo and Juliet from being together and is what they try to overcome for the duration of the play.

Once the stasis is broken, the play begins, and several events happen that lead the characters towards a breaking point: a moment when the main **conflict** is at its emotional high point. At that moment, called the **climax**, whatever actions the protagonist undertakes will lead to the resolution of the conflict and consequently to the resolution of the play. All the actions that happen up until the Climax fall into what we call **rising action**, while everything that happens from the Climax to the end of the play is called **falling action**. In a good play, the climax is as close as possible to the end, because once the main conflict is **resolved**, there is little left to keep the audience engaged.

The climax needs to involve the protagonist of the play and deal with the main conflict. Let's go back to *Romeo and Juliet*. The main conflict of the play is that Romeo and Juliet—both protagonists—want to be together, but because of the hatred between their families, they can't. Yet, they conceive a way to be together that entails several actions, which include getting the nurse on their side, getting secretly married, running away from Verona, and drinking a sleeping concoction. All of that falls into the rising action. The climax is when Juliet is in the tomb, still asleep, and Romeo walks in. While the audience knows that Juliet is merely sleeping, Romeo is clearly unaware of that. What the audience wishes for is for Juliet to wake up BEFORE Romeo does some extreme gesture, and that moment is exactly the climax. It's the moment when the audience doesn't know how it is all going to end. Once Romeo kills himself with his dagger, we know they will not live happily ever after. When Juliet wakes up, it is too late. Romeo is dead, she can't fathom living without him and uses his dagger to kill herself. That is the beginning of the falling action. Then the Friar arrives with the two families, but it is too late to save the day. His final speech functions as the resolution of the play and highlights its moral: hate will only lead to tragedy. As you can see, in the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, the climax is

really close to the end of the play.

There are other important terms to remember when it comes to script analysis. One of them is **reversal**, which is an unexpected twist in the plot. A reversal is a sudden complication that prevents the protagonist from moving forward. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, a reversal happens when the letter that the Friar sends to Romeo, warning him about Juliet's fake death, doesn't reach the young man.

It is also important to understand the difference between the **story** and the **plot**. The story is the whole thing: every fact and detail about what happened and how it happened. The plot, instead, is a selection of events from the story. The story is the bigger picture, the plot is the arrangement of snapshots. This is true for theatre and for the big screen. Think about it: take World War II. How many movies are about it? Hundreds, yet each one is different. The story, in this case, is World War II, while each movie selects certain events that happened during the war and arranges them into a timeline and into a screenplay.

When it comes to plots, there are two main types. There is the **linear** or **casual plot**, where everything happens chronologically, following the cause-effect chain of events. Then there is the **episodic plot**, which rearranges the events regardless of the chronological order using **flashbacks** and **flash-forwards**. As you can guess, the linear plot follows the laws of nature and sticks to realism, while the episodic plot lends itself to more complex narratives and storytelling. Flashbacks might provide insights into the characters or plant clues for something that might happen… at some point. That is often the case in television series, where writers do this to keep doors open to possible future developments.

Frequently, plays feature **subplots** as well, as a way to give supporting characters more background and provide more information about the world of the play. A subplot is a secondary timeline involving supporting characters who might have their own personal journey, with their own conflict to solve. Subplots also function as a relief from the main plot, a way to give the audience a break from the primary conflict. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, there is a subplot at the beginning, involving Mercutio and Tybalt, that leads the two characters into a fight that will eventually kill Mercutio.

ARISTOTLE'S ELEMENTS OF THE PERFECT PLAY

How to Watch a Production of a Play!

When you go to the theatre and enter the house, your theatrical experience begins. In order to enjoy it fully, there are a few things you should keep in mind and look for.

First, unwrap all of your candies now. Don't wait to do it in the middle of the most tense scene of the play.

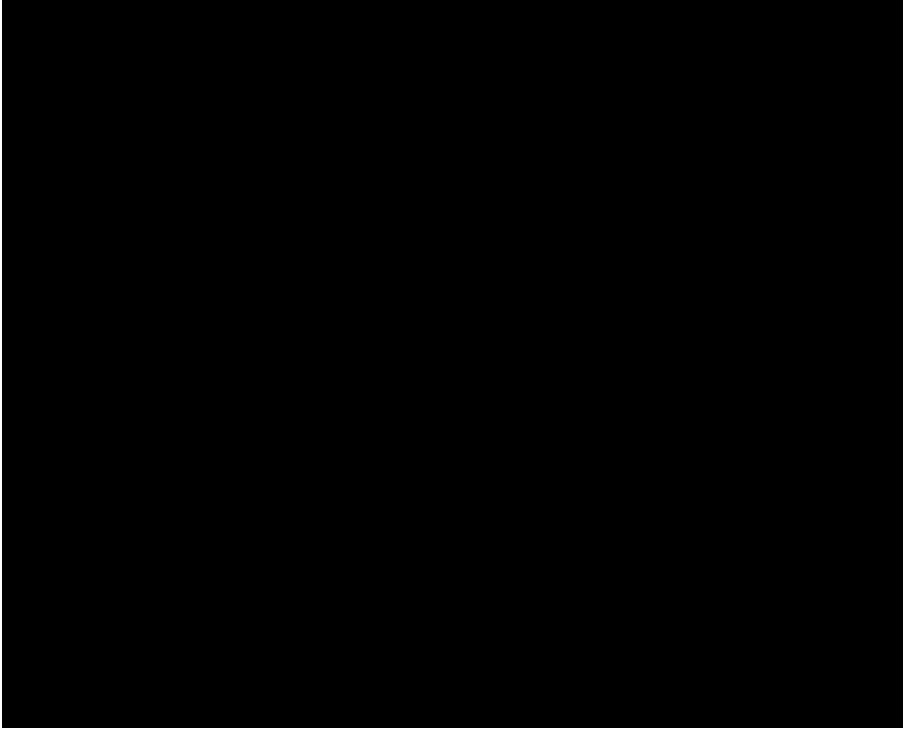
There is no right or wrong way to experience a theatre production and you might end up loving it, hating it, or anything in between. You might be in attendance because you chose to do it, because you are going along with a friend, or to support someone in the production, or just… because you got a free ticket, and, why not! You might have previous knowledge about the play, or not. Regardless, allow yourself to be surprised and be open to what the performance is bringing to life and to you. The one thing that should not happen is that the performance leaves you indifferent.

Theatre happens live every time. The show begins and doesn't stop until the end. You can't "pause" it like you do for shows and movies on TV. You can't replay one scene because you missed it and got distracted. You have to pay attention and retain the details of the story as they are presented to you.

As you are sitting in the house, quite likely someone helped you to your seat. That would be an **usher,** who has also given you a program, also known as **playbill.** Inside it, you will find all the information about the show, including brief biographies of the actors and of the creative team and a director's note, which will introduce you to the play and to the specific concept for that production.

When the house goes dark and the curtain rises, the magic begins.

Invocation and Instructions to the Audience, from the musical "THE FROGS" by Stephen Sondheim (1974)



Allow yourself to suspend your disbelief and focus on following the story. Remember: the actors can't see you, but they can "feel" you. A good audience energizes and complements the actors and truly helps them move forward. It is part of the live component of the theatre, the mutual exchange of energy going from the stage to the audience and vice versa. So, please, turn off your cell phones! Not only are they a distraction for you and for those around you, but they are visible from the stage too. Do you really want to let the actors think that they are boring you to the point of resorting to scrolling your social media? Please, be respectful of the work that everyone in the production has put into it. A show is a brief moment in your day, and usually has an intermission where you can catch up on with the outside world.

Emergencies aside, refrain from leaving the theatre in the middle of the show. Many productions won't allow audience members to re-enter the theatre once they exit and the same can be said for latecomers: if you arrive after the show has begun, you might not be allowed in for a while, sometimes until intermission.

Is it OK to clap in the middle of a show to compliment the actors? Well, not really, although the etiquette isn't that definitive. It is not unusual to see the

audience clap at the first entrance of a famous actor on stage. Broadway shows often feature well-known stars and the audience acknowledgment through clapping is almost expected and given its space in the staging of the scene. Otherwise, clapping may interfere with the storytelling and create a distraction for the actors, who struggle to stay in character. The best practice is to hold the clapping for the curtain call when all the actors will drop their character, line up and bow.

How to write a theatre review

KEY WORDS

Antagonist

Inciting Incident/Initial Event

Catharsis

Climax

Conflict

Critic

Episodic Plot

Falling Action / Rising Action

Flashbacks / Flash Forwards

Linear / Casual Plot

Playbill

Plot / Sub-Plot

Protagonist

Resolution

Reversal

Story

Usher

4 Genres and Styles

Kiara Pipino

This chapter will introduce you to the different types of theatrical genres and styles. A lot of what you will learn will sound familiar since genre and style apply to other forms of narratives, such as novels and movies. Here we will just apply what you probably already know to theatre, with specific examples of scripts and theatrical movements.

Genre

In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the definition of genre is as follows: "A category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content.[1]"

How can you define the genre of a play?

Similarly to other narratives, the genre is determined by what happens in the play and the overall tone of the action. It also heavily relies on the emotional response of the audience generated by the play. Does the play have a light tone, a happy ending, and makes you laugh? Then you are reading (or attending a production of) a comedy! Conversely: is the play serious in tone, does it make you think about what is happening, and are you experiencing intense emotions? Then you are experiencing a tragedy or a drama (soon we will see the difference). We will discuss the two main genres, the tragedy, and the comedy, and then introduce others, such as melodramas and the tragicomedy. As for styles, this chapter will discuss absurdism and docudrama.

Tragedy and comedy are the most established and popular genres in theatre, and they are clearly opposites of one another. They have both existed since the

beginning of Western Theatre.

Tragedy

In everyday life and language, the term "tragic" immediately speaks of the seriousness of an issue or an event. In theatre, the term and genre date back to the 7th century B.C. It had specific features, some of which are carried into today. In a classic tragedy, the protagonist needs to deal with **ethical choices**, rather than practical ones. An ethical choice entails high stakes for the character and demands him to make a difficult decision, sometimes even deciding between life and death, for him or someone else. For example, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the protagonist must decide whether to kill his uncle in order to avenge the murder of his father (who had been killed by his uncle). Classic Greek tragedies also used **heightened language**, such as verse.

TRAGEDY: Sophocle's *Oedipus The King*

[redacted]

For the purposes of his argument, Aristotle analyzes Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (429 B.C). In his analysis, Aristotle outlined the important elements of a

tragedy and used *Oedipus the King* as an example. King Oedipus is the so-called **Greek Hero**, the play's protagonist, the character who undergoes the greatest change and who is stained by a **tragic flaw**, in Greek "*hamartia*." Oedipus' flaw is his arrogance: he was thought to be smarter than anyone, including the gods. That was what triggered his demise. Yet, because everything he did was fueled by good intentions, the audience empathizes with him and doesn't want him to suffer the tragic ending. Oedipus, who had proved to be a good king and a good example for the people takes responsibility for his actions and decides to become the living proof of his own fault. The behavior of the character is therefore educational for the audience, who undergoes ***catharsis***, a release of their emotions related to what the character had gone through.

Aristotle believed that the Greek hero needed to have **high social status**: he had to be someone that the common audience member – likely a citizen of Athens – could look up to because if a king commits a mistake and cannot escape his fate/the judgment/justice, despite being able to manipulate the rules to his advantage, it is clear to the audience that they have even less of that chance. Regardless, Oedipus also accepts his fate, as he recognizes his fault and makes amends – hence, he is redeemed and still stands as someone to look up to by the common audience member.

Along with characters being of noble birth, Aristotle mentioned a tragedy needing to deal with a **subject of relevance**, that is to say, something that goes beyond personal gain and is related to the commonwealth of the greater community. Going back to the main point of the tragedy as a genre: Oedipus has to make an ethical choice. Would pursuing justice for king Laius, despite having so many warning signs about this, be his downfall? Being an ethical character and a Greek hero, he moved forward in the pursuit of justice, basically sentencing himself to disgrace. It is important to state that in a classic tragedy, the protagonist is always a male character.

Classic tragedies have kept almost the same features up until the second half of the 19th century when the change in social patterns resulted in the rise of new issues and topics of interest. Within the Industrial Revolution, common people were able to improve their socioeconomic status thanks to their hard work, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit. It allowed for the rise of the middle class, a class of people with newfound wealth but not much Classic education. Their economic power soon started to weigh heavily on the social and cultural

dynamics all throughout Europe and America. These people wanted their own culture and wanted to see their stories represented and celebrated. They had less interest in plays with kings, emperors, and princes having to face obscure and obnoxious prophecies, ghosts, and plagues. Yet, they wanted to go to the theatre! At the time, the theatre was just as much a place to go to be seen as a place to go to see something: going to the theatre granted acknowledgment of social status.

It was important to have a change in what was being staged in the theatre, to better highlight the shift in society: the downfall of the noble class who were literate but were slowly and surely losing their economic power, and the rise of the middle class and "self-made men."

Playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen started writing plays that kept the structure of the classic tragedy, in terms of characters having to face ethical choices and dealing with a subject of relevance, but dismantled almost everything else. Characters were not of noble birth anymore but rather ordinary people the audience could recognize and immediately identify with. They still had to face extraordinary circumstances, but even so, those were all things that could very well happen to anyone in the audience. The protagonist could also finally be a female character. Several of Ibsen's plays have a female protagonist, such as *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *The Lady of the Sea*. The dialogue is written in **plain language**, and the characters speak as they would in their everyday life.

Ultimately, **modern tragedies**, also called **dramas**, introduce the idea of **realism**: what we see on stage needs to be directly relatable to reality, the time, the place, and the society that generated it. I am not interested in watching a play about a distant king because we have nothing in common. Instead, I am interested in watching what happens to my next-door neighbor while he/she goes through a particular challenge because we share common ground and whatever he/she is going through could happen to me as well. Modern tragedies, therefore, become more personal to their audience.

Later in the 20th century, one of the greatest American playwrights, Arthur Miller, contributed to the relatively new genre with *Death of a Salesman*, which made a very specific and compelling statement. The play premiered in 1949 and won the Pulitzer Prize that same year. It is considered to this day one of the masterpieces of the 20th century. It is about the death of the American dream and about how that affected the life of a common man, Willy Loman. Miller

wanted to point out that the relevance of the subject directly influences the lives of common people, not just of those high up on the social ladder. Hence, the title of the play. While it resounds a classical value, it highlights its difference: it is not *Death of a King*, but rather *Death of a Salesman*, a common man.

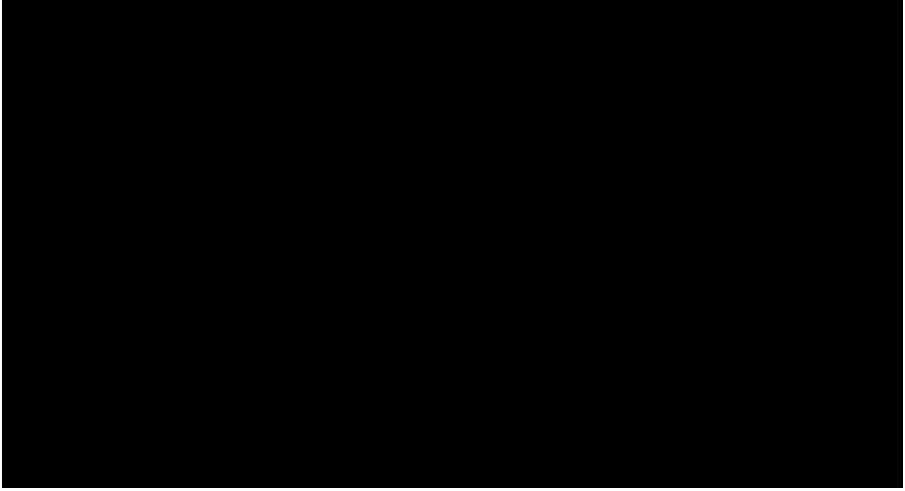
Dramas also don't necessarily have a simplistically tragic ending. Classic tragedies ended with some outstanding act of violence, death, or situation of no return. Dramas, instead, are more rooted in the psyche and the journey of the characters. In *A Doll's House*, the protagonist, Nora, leaves her husband and her children behind to go in search of her own identity. No one dies, but that is certainly not a traditional happy ending, particularly if you put the play in its context. It premiered in 1879, when women were not allowed to just walk out of a marriage and, even more so, leave their children behind. In truth, the play stirred up quite a storm back then.

Comedy

It is safe to say that a comedy is the polar opposite of a tragedy. While watching a comedy, the audience will never feel a true sense of fear, although they might feel some pity for the characters as they go through a series of unfortunate practical events. It is a pity that generates from the idea of laughing at the expense of someone else's misfortune, but a life-threatening situation is never its cause. You laugh at the guy slipping on the banana peel and landing on his ass, not at the guy falling off a building.

> "*Comedy humbles us at the same time it comforts us–we are not alone in our many failures.*" (*Wendy MacLeod*[1])

Overture/Comedy Tonight from the musical "A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM" by Stephen Sondheim



Comedies have several features, and here we will introduce them all.

First off, in comedies the characters have to face practical choices, not ethical ones. Characters ponder more about *how* to do things rather than deciding *if* they should do things. How can I steal money from my master? How can I pretend not to be seen while I am stealing food from the kitchen? How can I get out of the bedroom before the husband of the woman I am with comes in? Those are the kind of questions and situations that are typical of a comedy.

Needless to say, a comedy should generate hilarity and laughter… and have a happy ending!

Comedies, even more than dramas, feature characters that are common people, sometimes with not much psychological insight either.

Stock characters are very popular in comedies as well. A **stock character** represents an archetype, a category of people, and behaves how that category of people is expected to behave. Archetypes are therefore immediately recognizable because of their universality, which makes it easier for the audience to relate and react to. Because of their lack of psychological insight and depth, they rely heavily on stereotypes and cliché, almost reaching the level of caricatures. Examples of stock characters include the servant, the boss, the villain, the dumb blonde, the jealous husband, and the overprotective mother…just to name a few.

A particular and very popular style of comedy is **Commedia dell'Arte**, which originated in Italy in the 16th century and heavily uses stock characters. Commedia plays have created some of the most comedic scenes in history, and

characters that have survived the test of time for their universality and comedic essence. While Commedia dell'Arte characters rely on elaborate costumes and specific physicality, they are all stock characters. The origin of each one of them often goes back to the actor who originated the role, in terms of accent and costume.

Below is a breakdown of some of the most famous ones:

- Arlequin – the funny servant, always dressed in a multicolored diamond-pattern pantsuit and wearing a half mask
- Pantalone (Pantaloon) – a greedy lawyer, always dressed in a red costume with a black cape and wearing a half mask with a long, crooked nose
- The Doctor – a doctor, with not much knowledge about anything, heavy set with a prominent belly, wearing a black ornate pantsuit, a white collar, a black cape, and a half mask with a big nose and some whiskers
- Colombina – the female servant, wearing a period-style dress, and no mask
- The Captain – the captain of a ship, who pretends to be valiant and heroic, but is afraid of everything. He wears a colored pantsuit – yellow, orange, or striped- a wide hat and a half mask with a long, pointed/phallic nose and whiskers
- Pulcinella – a belligerent servant, a loner and usually sad. He wears a white suit and a half-black mask with a prominent nose.

FERRUCCIO SOLERI as ARLEQUIN. *"1. Retratos de la Commedia dell'Arte" by Luigi Lunari/ Festival de Almagro is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.*

Commedia dell'Arte introduced the concept of **slapstick comedy**, named after a particular tool, the slapstick, which is a long and flat paddle used for beatings. The ingenious design of the instrument allowed the actors to successfully pretend to beat each other without actually getting hurt, as the paddle had two wooden leaves that, with minimal contact, would bang each other and make a lot of noise. Hence, the noise made the audience believe the hit must have been huge, while it really was not. Slapstick comedy today means a fast-paced comedy emphasizing larger-than-life movements and frequently involving some form of petty violence. The faster the pace, the more the comedy becomes farcical, or a **farce**. A good example of a farce is Michael Frayn's *Noises Off!* or Alan Ayckbourn's *Bedroom Farce*.

Along with a fast rhythm, there are several other devices that are instrumental to a comedy. These include *misunderstandings* (like delivering a letter to the wrong person), *foul language* (curse words are always funny for some reason), *violation of social hierarchy* (like an old person pretending to be much younger or a servant acting up as the master), *coincidences/ mistaken identities* (like in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, where confusion ensues as four characters are two sets of twins), and *extreme physicality* (like, as we have just seen, Commedia dell'Arte). In most cases, comedies use most of those devices in their plots. Different from the tragic genre, comedy has always retained the same structure and used the same devices. Famous classic Greek comedic playwright Aristophanes (445-386 B.C.) used in his plays the exact same comedic elements as Shakespeare (1582-1616) or the contemporary Michael Frayn (1933).

Comedic Styles

Under the umbrella of comedy, there are several different styles. **Situation Comedy**, also known as Sit-Com, is one of them. In this kind of comedy, the humor comes from the situation the characters find themselves in. Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* is a good example of a situation comedy, as everything that happens is dictated by the presence of two sets of twins (two sets of brothers separated at birth and unaware of the other's existence) in the same location. American playwright Neil Simon is also famous for his situation comedies, one of which is certainly *The Odd Couple*. Sit-coms have become very popular on the small screen with the proliferation of TV series. Examples would include *Ted Lasso*, *Only Murderers in the Building*, *Friends*, *How I Met your Mother*, *The Golden Girls*… the list could go on and on and on.

Comedy of Manners, on the other hand, tends to rely on characters and their social status. They were particularly popular in the 19th Century and used to make fun of the social mannerisms of the aristocracy, especially in England. Oftentimes they embedded a very critical view of the targets of their comedy and were close to social satire. One of the most renowned authors of this kind of comedy is Oscar Wilde, who wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, and *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

Romantic Comedies, as the name suggests, rely on the dynamic of a love story

and on how the characters must overcome practical obstacles in order to be together. An example of romantic comedy can be Wycherley's *The Country Wife* or Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*. All of the Hallmark Channel's movies can safely be considered romantic comedies.

A **Comedy of Character** is a piece that focuses on the adventures and misadventures of a character, generally the protagonist. Examples include Moliere's *The Miser*, Bean's *One Man, Two Guvnors*, and Goldoni's *Arlequin Servant of Two Masters*.

Finally, a **Comedy of Ideas** is based on a philosophical concept brought to its extremes. An example includes Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, where the "idea" comes from the women of Athens, who decide that they have had enough of their husbands being off at war and go on a sex strike until their men came back home for good and stop the war. Another famous playwright of comedies of ideas is George Bernard Shaw, whose plays include *Men and Superman*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, and *Pygmalion*.

Tragicomedy

The tragicomedy is a genre that combines some elements of the tragedy with some elements of the comedy. In particular, a tragicomedy features everyday characters dealing with a subject of some relevance and oftentimes has a happy ending.

Good examples of a tragicomedy can be Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In *Waiting for Godot*, which premiered in 1953, Vladimir and Estragon discuss a variety of subjects close to existentialism, violence, and communication while they wait for their friend Godot to arrive. Yet, Godot never shows up. Russian playwright Anton Chekhov's plays can also be considered tragicomedies.

American playwright Tracy Letts' Pulitzer Prize (2007) winning play *August: Osage County* also fits the description of a tragicomedy, portraying the dynamics of a dysfunctional extended family who gather in rural Oklahoma because of the disappearance of a family member—who is later found dead. The

play features scenes of intense comedy while also tackling issues like addiction, racism, and incest. More recently, Letts' play *The Minutes* (2021) also combines comedic and tragic elements as it investigates the troubled past of a small community while presenting the apparently innocuous, unassuming, and underwhelming personalities of small-scale politicians and community leaders. In Tracy Letts' plays mentioned above, there are not a proper happy endings, but the tone masterfully keeps the balance between high and low notes, leaving the audience thinking about what they are laughing at and about if that should be the case.

Melodrama

The term melodrama was first utilized in France in the 19th Century and indicated a drama with a melody and some music. They were a popular form of entertainment in Europe into the early 20th century, where they slowly developed into operettas and eventually into musicals. Melodramas originated in response to the need of the newly formed middle class to have their own style of social and cultural entertainment.

In a melodrama, the action (whatever happens to the characters) is more important than the characters themselves (who tend to overplay their emotions and emerge as stock characters). As a matter of fact, even today when we say someone or something is melodramatic, we usually mean that it is overly emotional.

In a melodrama, the characters are usually ordinary people who face extraordinary—borderline impossible—circumstances. Themes and subjects tend to be rather serious, with a distinct division between good and evil, culminating in a happy ending. The main idea behind most melodramas is that something wrong has happened or is about to happen and justice needs to prevail, and it does. A common plot line would involve a damsel in distress being sexually threatened or harassed until the hero comes and saves her from the villain. Plots tend to be straightforward, following the cause/effect chain of events, stereotypical, and therefore predictable. The audience has an underlying perception of what will happen and how it all is going to end.

Spectacles would play a major role in a melodrama, with music being part of said spectacle. An interesting example of Melodrama is *The Phantom of the Opera*. While we are most familiar with the brilliant 1986 musical version by Andrew Lloyd Webber, it was originally a novel and categorized as a melodrama, written by Gaston Leroux in 1910. The complexity of the musical itself transcends the simplicity of a melodrama, yet some elements of it still remain, such as the clear division between good and evil, a great deal of spectacle, the presence of stock characters (such as the diva, the damsel in distress and the lover) and of course, a happy ending. Melodramas have transferred well to other media as well, such as to the small screen as soap operas.

Styles

Theatre of the Absurd

Theatre of the Absurd stands for the kind of plays written right after World War II, during the shocking aftermath of the war. Mostly in Europe, playwrights and artists in general had a very hard time coping with the loss, the annihilation of human lives, the horrors, and the massive physical destruction all around them. Communication, words in general, had not been able to prevent any of it and it was felt that words could no longer create bridges or make sense of anything. As a result, the plays that came out of this period tend not to rely on logic *per se* but rather on a structure that is somewhat circular to show that there can't be any actual change in anything from the beginning to the end of the play and that all that is left just has to be silence.

What was the purpose of these plays? Mostly, it was an attempt to let the audience experience the absurdity of witnessing something without any apparent or coherent logic and to push them out of their complacency. Complacency is what they considered responsible for the horrors of the war. At the same time, it was a way to highlight the complex human condition, with its existential conundrums and queries that exhaust our minds in search of

solutions when there are none, and we are basically alone in a meaningless world. Realizing all this would have the effect of liberation, allowing the audience to move forward.

The most influential playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd style are the Romanian-French Eugene Ionesco and the Irish Samuel Beckett. Examples of plays in this style include: Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, *The Bald Soprano* and *The Lesson*; Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*. In the U.S.A., the playwright that is the closest in style to the Theatre of the Absurd is Edward Albee, whose plays navigate a different kind of logic, often inherent to the world of the play rather than to reality itself. Some examples of his plays include *The Zoo Story* (1959), *The Sandbox* (1960), *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), *A Delicate Balance* (1966, Pulitzer Prize winner), *Seascape* (1975 Pulitzer Prize winner), and *Three Tall Women* (1991 Pulitzer Prize winner).

Documentary Theatre, also called Docutheatre or Verbatim Theatre

Documentary theatre uses real documented stories and turns them into a theatrical piece that is presentational and direct, without much support coming from other common elements of a theatrical production (such as costumes or scenery). Usually, the plays are based on real people and most of the lines come from interviews that the playwright conducted personally, or that are part of archival material.

Pioneers in this style include American playwright Anna Deveare Smith, author of *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*, a play about the riots following the acquittal of the officers accused of the beating of Rodney King. Smith conducted about 300 interviews in order to put together the different points of view she needed for her play, which she wrote and performed as a one-woman show. Venezuelan playwright and director Moises Kaufmann also utilizes this style in his plays. With his company, the Tectonic Theatre Company, he wrote *The Laramie*

Project, a play about the infamous hate crime against Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming, in 1998. The young man was kidnapped, tied to a fence naked, and brutally beaten. He was found the following morning, still alive, but in a coma. He never regained consciousness and died at the hospital a few days later. The perpetrators later admitted that they wanted to "teach him a lesson" since he was gay. When they were working on the play, Kaufman's theatre company stayed in Laramie to interview. The play resulted in an orchestra of voices, with actors playing several roles and introducing the characters to the audience.

In verbatim theatre, the performers never attempt to become a character because there is no character, but rather a real person whose words alone are worth being spoken out loud and in front of an audience. Then what is the difference between a documentary and a documentary theatre piece? The narrative, and, of course, the medium. The artist presents the facts dryly, but truthfully, and the audience has to make up their minds and fill in the gaps with their imagination.

KEY WORDS

Characters of Noble birth/Ordinary People

Classic Tragedy

Comedic Devices (*misunderstandings, mistaken identities, etc.*)

Comedy / Comedic Styles

Comedy of Manners

Comedy of Ideas

Comedy of Character

Commedia dell'Arte (and its characters)

Drama

Ethical Choices

Greek Hero

Language: Verse vs. Ordinary Language

Melodrama

Modern Tragedy/Drama

Oedipus the King

Practical Choices

Romantic Comedy

Situation Comedy

Slapstick Comedy

Stock Characters

Subject of Relevance

Theatre of the Absurd

Tragic Flaw/Hamartia

Tragicomedies

Verbatim Theatre

1 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/genre

1. Wendy MacLeod is an American playwright and professor. She teaches at Kenyon College
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II

Professionals in the Theatre: Who Does What?

Who works in the Theatre Business?

Here's the breakdown of everyone involved in a theatrical production. In the following chapters we will further investigate the theatre business to introduce you to the artists and professionals and to inform you of the dynamics of the theatrical material.

Creatives

Those who create the aesthetic of the show.

- The playwright – the author of the script
- The actor – the person giving a voice and a body to the character
- The director – the person in charge of the staging and of the creative concept behind the show
- The producer – the person/people/organization financially supporting the show
- The set designer – the person in charge of creating the visual world of the show
- The costume designer – the person in charge of giving the characters their look
- The light designer – the person in charge of lighting the show
- The prop designer – the person in charge of the design (and sometimes execution) of the properties in the show
- The sound designer – the person in charge of the sound cues in the show, and of the amplification of the production
- The choreographer – the person in charge of the aesthetic of the dance in the show

- The fight choreographer – the person in charge of staging violence safely in the show
- The intimacy choreographer – the person in charge of staging intimacy scenes safely in the show
- The music director – the person in charge of the musical aspect of the production
- The dialect coach – the person in charge of helping the actors with accents
- The dramaturg – the person in charge of supporting the production with related research
- The casting director – the person or the agency that intervenes when there is the need of pre-selecting a group of actors for the director

There could be many other creative artists involved in a production, depending on the type of production, and they could include a make-up artist, a wig artist, a projection designer, a special effect designer, a stunt choreographer, etc.

Crew

Those that make the show happen.

- The stage manager – the person in charge of running rehearsals, and upon opening, running the show. The stage manager usually has at least two assistants.
- The technical director – the person in charge of building the set and of the safety of the production
- The costume shop manager – the person in charge of building and managing the costumes for the show
- The master electrician – the person in charge of hanging the lights
- The master carpenter – the person in charge operating the set safely
- The light board operator – the person in charge of executing the light cues for the show
- The sound board operator – the person in charge of executing the sound cues for the show
- The run crew – the people who stay backstage and help with scene and costume changes. The scene and costume shops employ carpenters,

stitchers, drapers.

Front of the House

Those who organize, manage and interface with the audience.

- The public relation office – the people who promote the show in the media
- The marketing office – the people who strategize the advertisement for the show
- The literary department- it includes the people in charge of sorting script submissions
- The box office manager – the person in charge of ticket sales
- The house manager – the person in charge of managing the house when it is open for a production and who deals with issues regarding the audience
- The ushers – the person who is in charge of seating the audience

Depending on the size or tastes of the individual theatre, personnel may include people working in the cloak room, in concessions, and in merchandising.

5 The Actor

Andrew Kahl

> The material you use to create these imaginary people who you can pick up and discard like a glove is your own flesh and blood. The actor is giving of himself all the time. It is his possible growth, his possible understanding that he is exploiting, using this material to weave these personalities which drop away when the play is done.
>
> –Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*

The craft of acting is deceptively simple. It starts with childhood experiences of "make-believe." Because imitation and role-playing are such a natural extension of human social behavior, it is easy to assume that the craft and profession of acting retain the simplicity, freedom, and intuitive nature of childhood games. At its best, acting appears effortless. It invites an audience to forget that actors are in any way different from the characters they impersonate. With the support of an audience, an actor becomes another person who occupies their place within the confines of a story, imagined circumstance, or scene. This imaginative exercise is such an ingrained feature of human social behavior that we often forget that it is based on a shared acceptance — between audiences and actors — that they are both willing to play the game in order to collectively believe in and relate to a **performance**.

The central task of acting is **impersonation**, the imitation or imagined inhabitation of a different persona. Impersonation can happen on many levels. In some cultures, a familiar part of religious practice is the idea of spiritual possession in which an entranced host is temporarily occupied by another spiritual being. In Haitian Vodou, for example, a familiar relationship with spirits and ancestral worship becomes more immediate when possession occurs during a "sacred theatre" ritual. Against the background of complex drumming, induced trances invite spirits to commune and give comfort directly to worshipers.[1] In this example, both the belief and the transformation into a new persona are complete, made possible by the readiness of both the possessed and their witnesses to fully believe in what they are experiencing.

Trance dancing, frequently accompanied or guided by elaborate drumming and masked impersonation, is a feature of ritualized practice in many African, Native American, and Asian cultures. The altering sense of awareness and prominence of sacred masks as spiritually vital symbols —or as a talisman for connection to ancestors or traditional sacred figures— is widespread. Even in Western theatre, the actor's awareness on stage is often so concentrated on the task of perceiving from a character's viewpoint that the experience is described as transformative. Recent studies involving brain scans suggest that actors do, in fact, experience different patterns of thought while "in character," including a diminished level of activity in the areas of the brain associated with self-awareness and an increase in portions of the brain that may support a "double consciousness."[2]

Balinese dance drama performance from a private temple blessing ceremony, Gianyar, Bali, 2017. Photo by Andrew Kahl.

Masked performance often blends both creative artistic expression and spirituality. In the Bali-Hindu traditions of Indonesia, for example, performances of masked dance and puppet dramas are closely blended with communal expressions of faith, ancestor worship, and the broad creative appeal of beautiful and entertaining performances. Ceremonial masks are sacred objects. For performances to serve both religious and artistic purposes is not a contradiction, it is simply a recognition that artistic performance, impersonation, and spiritual practice can serve parallel social functions.

The most obvious symbol of impersonation is, of course, a **mask**. The use and significance of masks in spiritual practice predate the earliest written acknowledgments of acting as an art form. The first tragedians of ancient Greece, to whom we often point as the originators of Theatre during the 6th century BCE, used masks to symbolize and differentiate the roles assumed by tragic poets in their performances. Greek tragedies were chanted, featuring rhythmic verse and dialogue between important characters and a responsive chorus. Eventually, the structure of the plays expanded to include multiple characters presented by multiple actors, with more elaborate theatrical elements, including sets and choreography. The ancient Greeks valued theatre as a civic instrument for cultural improvement. Competitive festivals featuring tragic poets were interwoven with religious festivals, most famously at the City

Dionysia, a festival held in Athens every spring to celebrate the god of wine.

Greek depiction of a Tragedians mask sculpted in bronze. Actual masks would have been made of wood or linen. "File:Greek tragedy mask, 4th cent. B.C. (PAM 4640, 1-6-2020).jpg" by George E. Koronaios is marked with CC0 1.0.

Impersonation can serve more subtle functions. The playing of characters as we relate stories and inhabit characters who are familiar or distinctive is a natural practice. Humans are remarkable mimics, with the ability to recapture the rhythms, gestures, and sounds of others with enough accuracy to be recognized. We learn social skills by mimicking the people around us. Adapting our behavior to influence others is the first step toward social connection and awareness. **Mimicry** is the ability to accurately imitate the behavior of others. A good mimic is able to invoke familiar aspects of other people, and this process of accurately recapturing voice, expressions, and gestures can inform an actor's development of a **character**. When we role-play, whether it is in a childhood game, a story related to friends of past events, or a fully fictional representation in a theatre, the **persona** that is created is normally referenced as the character, typically with distinctive, and often fictional, features, viewpoints, and life experiences that differ from those of the actor.

Figure 3: Aristotle sculpted in Marble from a copy of Bronze bust by Lysippos, c. 330 BCE

In 350 BCE, **Aristotle** wrote *The Poetics*, attempting to define the nature and necessary elements of Poetic Tragedy and Comedy. While his writing is frequently cited for identifying the six elements of theatre —Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Song— the importance of *The Poetics* to our understanding of acting owes more to his emphasis on the poet's task of **imitation**.

Aristotle is startlingly succinct in defining a poet's imitation of life as the central value of theatre since it provides the audience with a model for comparison. Watching a performer's imitation of life allows us to see the creature (or character) imitated as being better, worse, or truly reflective of human nature. Modern debate references the term ***catharsis***, attributing to Aristotle the recognition of how true and relatable action was capable of inducing pity or fear in an audience and – perhaps – inducing a purging effect

on the emotions. In essence, catharsis allows an audience to live sympathetically through the emotional experience of a character that is faithfully and consistently acted. Aristotle makes another vital point, saying that "imitation is implanted in man from early childhood" and "...through imitation he learns his earliest lessons." If Aristotle is to be believed, the value of truthful acting, and of our imaginative ability to imitate, is its power to teach us more about ourselves.[3]

The Evolution of Acting

If the steady foundation of acting is impersonation, based on the imitation of human behavior in the depiction of a character, the variable for how we perceive that evolving art form is **aesthetics**. The artistic tastes that govern what audiences value and respond to in an acting performance, and the periodic reformulation of these standards, have led to substantial changes in the kinds of acting and dramatic forms that have emerged in the two and a half millennia since the Greek Tragedians took the roles of *Protagonists* (from the Greek *protos* meaning" first" and *agonistes* meaning "actor") in their first public performances.

The story of how drama has evolved overlaps with other performance traditions; music, dance, poetry, puppetry, acrobatics, and the visual artistry of scenic, costume, mask, and makeup design is a global story of interwoven cultural journeys. Along the way, variations in dramatic art forms have created completely new traditions. Asian expressions of dance and music evolved into the Operatic forms of Chinese Opera, the dramatic performances of Indian dance dramas, the puppet theatre of Java, and the dynamic stylized performance of Japanese Kabuki. Each form is distinctive and unique to the cultural values and aesthetics that shaped them. Each variation of the art form included the evolution of specific rules, or **conventions**, that define what is desirable and celebrated in the performance.

In Western theatre, performance has always been governed by specific conventions. The Greeks relied on conventions of mask use and poetic forms. They built outdoor theatres with specific features to support performances and

evolved aesthetics for scenic devices and the depiction of characters in costumes. The Romans adapted their version of Greek theatre and incorporated a more aggressive use of pantomime and physical action reflective of the audience's tastes and values of Roman society. Medieval liturgical drama was closely governed by rules of interpretation. During the Renaissance, spoken plays in England and Spain developed inventive methods for staging, styles of performance, and even for the design and commercialization of theatres. Plays were written to please both the groundlings and the elevated rows of more expensive seats in Elizabethan playhouses. Actors needed proficiency in the delivery of poetic text, dance, and music —not to mention convincing swordplay— to keep the whole audience entertained.

During the 18th and 19th Centuries, styles of performance —from the ornate posturing found in French and English comedies of manners to the overtly emotional *sturm und drang* interpretations of Shakespeare's work in the German Romantic era— were governed by the taste of the times, and acting styles adapted to those expectations. Entirely new art forms evolved from these experiments. Ballet and Opera were both built on the evolution of classical music and stylized dance forms. They blended dramatic stories that prominently featured these popular art forms and subsequently informed dramatic acting across Europe throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th Centuries. Even the evolution of the contemporary American Musical owes its origins to the blending of performance styles from the late 19th Century with contemporary popular music, dance, and singing, to create new dramatic structures and storytelling conventions.

From our 21st Century perspective, steeped in the influences of acting for film, television, and other recorded media, non-realistic acting may seem like a clumsy or unrefined version of the art form, but it simply adheres to a different set of conventions. "Good" acting is defined by the tastes of an audience and the parameters of behavior established by the artists. The central importance of being fully **present** in the work seems to be a constant in the evaluation of an actor's performance. Great actors are acclaimed for their ability to persuade an audience to be fully invested in and connected to the emotional relatability of their situation and their capacity to communicate "truthfully" through gestures and nuances of a performance. Being overly demonstrative or reliant on trite cliches to express a situation is often criticized, while the originality or

charismatic appeal of a performance is consistently praised. Great actors always seem to ride the edge of originality in performance without abandoning the rules and conventions of their time that govern audience expectations. The rise of silent film gives us interesting insights into how this evolution takes place. When we look at the early "passionate" performances delivered on film by silent film stars like Theda Bara or Rudolph Valentino, we may giggle at the smoldering reaction shots and melodramatic gestures, but the scale and energy of these performances were widely praised and appreciated by audiences of the era. As filmmaking evolved, actors too discovered that the scale of a performance designed to reach the back row of a large Broadway theatre was not well suited to the film medium. By the 1960s, American filmmaking had redefined the subtlety of acting as an art form, demanding that actors work at a scale that was believable and understated.

In 1602, Shakespeare gave us some insight into the conventions of his time when Hamlet instructs a group of players on the nuances of subtle performance. The playwright deftly describes the priorities of his time and the failures of actors who do too much.

> ...suit the action to the word, the
> word to the action; with this special observance,
> o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for any thing so
> overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end,
> both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere,
> the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature,
> scorn her own image, and the very age and body of
> the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone,
> or come tardy off, though it make the unskillful
> laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the
> censure of the which one must in your allowance
> o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. O, there be
> players that I have seen play, and heard others
> praise, and that highly, not to speak it profanely,
> that, neither having the accent of Christians nor
> the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so
> strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of
> nature's journeymen had made men and not made them
> well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

From *Hamlet's instructions to the Players*, *Act III*, *Scene 2*

Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre

A key influence on acting in the early 20th Century was the work of **Constantin Stanislavski** as an actor, teacher, and director at the Moscow Art Theatre. Steeped in contemporary ideas about psychology and realistic behavior, Stanislavski taught and wrote about the training of actors for the Russian stage. He was a fierce advocate that Russian theatre was capable of setting a new standard for **psychological realism**, that is, the truthful reflection of natural human behavior based on the needs of characters to achieve objectives by overcoming physical or psychological obstacles. Only through *perezhivanie*, the actual living of the part, could truthful, spontaneous, and fully believable acting be achieved.[4]

Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. "Konstantin Stanislavski" The New York Public Library Digital Collections. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-493a-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99

While much has been made of the singular contributions of Constantin Stanislavski as an originator of contemporary acting, he was also very much a creature of time. He was an eager acting student as a young amateur, preoccupied with analyzing and evaluating what he felt were his failures as a performer. His habit of self-criticism and analysis helped him define his own priorities as an artist, director, and teacher. These priorities seemed to blossom most effectively in his later collaborations with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, his partner in the founding of the Moscow Art Theatre, and in his direction and interpretation of Anton Chekhov's plays.

His written works attempting to explain his training methods were translated into English with substantial abridgments (*An Actor Prepares*, in 1936, *Building a Character*, in 1949, and *Creating a Role*, in 1961). In these books, Stanislavski and his principal English translator Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood attempted to capture "the grammar of acting."[5] He acknowledged that his theories were not original, but an attempt to capture the methods and priorities of actors who

had known instinctively how to create great and memorable performances.

His books are written as personal accounts from the perspective of a student attending classes with a teacher and director (Tortsov, who is based on Stanislavski himself as a teacher and director at the Moscow Art Theatre). The writing follows the mistaken assumptions of the student and his gradual discovery of rules and guidelines used to uncover truthful acting. The books embed key ideas of Stanislavski's observations about the art and craft of acting, including the need for actors to pursue **objectives** on stage, to respect the **given circumstances** and **obstacles** facing the character, and the obligation to become immersed in the dual consciousness of sensing and responding from the character's perspective while also staying conscious of the actor's responsibilities within the larger performance. Perhaps most influentially, Stanislavski advocated that the imaginative transformation of an actor into a character relies on the **"Magic If."** Simply put, if an actor could imagine being in the circumstances of the character deeply enough, the physical and emotional manifestations and expressions of the characters would flow from that accepted possibility.

The novelty of Stanislavski's approach and the broader impact of psychological realism was that actors were challenged to not only express the outward behavior and gestures of a character accurately but also to take ownership of inward thoughts and intentions. Thinking from within the characters' experience stimulates spontaneous physical and emotional reactions and a realistic belief in the immediate circumstances of a scene or situation. Stanislavski observed, in the great actors of his day, including Eleonora Duse and Tomasso Salvini, an exceptional attention to the details of natural gesture and behavior. In Duse, he found a performer who valued the erasure of her own identity in service to the playing of a character. In his writings, Stanislavski references the artistic approach of these natural performers and attempts to systematize their process in order to teach and direct a new generation of actors.

For more than thirty years, Stanislavski explored ways of describing the psycho-physiological transformation of acting. Along the way, he collaborated with remarkable playwrights (Anton Chekhov, Maxim Gorky), co-founded the Moscow Art Theatre with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, toured Europe and the United States with influential productions that ignited interest in his work,

and attracted students and imitators from across the globe.

The Method

After a successful tour of the United States by the Moscow Art Theatre in 1923, two former members of Stanislavski's company, Richard Boleslavski and Maria Ouspenskaya founded the *American Lab Theatre*, a school in New York that attempted in its brief ten-year lifespan to replicate the success of the Moscow Art Theatre as a center for innovative theatre creation and training. While many students who attended went on to have influential careers in New York and Hollywood, some of the nuances of Stanislavski's elaborate system were distorted or exaggerated in their reiteration. Famous teachers of what become known as "The Method" included Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, and Uta Hagen. Many of these teachers were artists in their own right who influenced the growth of American theatre, television, radio, and film. They also helped to train a generation of actors and directors around whom a certain level of hype and mystique was established. American audiences became enamored of the deeply invested, emotionally potent performances of actors like Marlon Brando, Anne Bancroft, Montgomery Clift, Ellen Burstyn, and James Dean. Actors trained in "The Method" seemed to have a vibrancy and emotional depth unmatched by other actors in film and television, and the industry took note. Many teachers who started training actors in New York found success working in Hollywood and developed fervent – and sometimes competitive – followers and loyalists.

One unfortunate consequence of this sudden rise of Method acting was the inference it created that these teachers were in possession of a formula or secret that could transform anyone into a movie star. This persistent idea, that acting is a formulaic craft that could be unlocked through the right combination of knowledge and experiences, diminishes the importance of inventiveness and originality in individual actors. A pattern – established with the original teachers of Method acting – reinforced loyalty to great acting teachers and adherence to their methods. Even in contemporary Method actors, like Daniel Day-Lewis and Christian Bale, our admiration for their work is sometimes conflated with a fascination for their self-sacrificing process of

preparing for roles or staying fully immersed in character experiences while working on a set or inhabiting a character. Whether this depth of investment is a necessary cost for deeply committed work or a potentially self-destructive focus on transformation, is a widely debated point in professional acting and in the current training of actors.

The reputation surrounding Method actors is mixed, as the demands of rehearsal and performance require both a collaborative actor and a believable character, especially in live performance. The success of Method acting in film is more sustainable, in part, because it is more editable. But an actor (or director) who sustains the "reality" of character experiences continuously flirts with the foundations of psychological attachment to the self. Actors who remain immersed in role-playing come to believe more deeply in the truth of what they are doing.

In 1971, Phillip Zimbardo, a psychologist at Stanford University, set out to test a theory about the aggressive behavior of guards in American prisons. In his experiment, 24 students were selected to participate in a study of the psychological effects of prison life. The participants were randomly divided into the roles of either prisoners or guards. What followed was a now infamous example of the ways in which complete investment in role-playing can transform behavior and perceptions. The experiment, originally scheduled to last for two weeks, was halted after 6 days due to the emotional consequences on the prisoners and the rapid escalation of abuse and cruelty from the guards. Even the leader of the experiment later acknowledged that he was drawn into the "role" of prison superintendent and lost his objectivity as a research psychologist.[6]

While this may seem like an isolated example, it is also a cautionary tale for actors. Immersion in an experience and the immediate actions of playing a role draw our imagination toward increased levels of belief in the reality of our experience. For actors who invest in a psychologically realistic approach, a performance is built from belief in the immediate reality of the situation. Reactions that occur "in character" are cultivated to be spontaneous, and the more deeply the actor invests in the reality of the situation, the more truthful and uncalculated those reactions and emotional responses become.

What is true and adaptable from this approach is the importance of developing any performance from the internal realities of the actor. The emotional

investment of the character belongs to the actor, and the communicated thoughts of the character are expressed by the actor, so any contemporary performance that is believable begins from the actor's ability to reveal a vulnerable part of themselves and react to the truth of that experience. The challenge for the actor is to balance the emotional and physical demands of an invested performance against the practical challenges of consistent and reliable collaboration with others in an artistic process.

Balanced Artistry

We may admire particular actors and wish to emulate their work. Sometimes this admiration is rooted in the qualities of a character they have played, or the charisma of the actor. Often, we relate to something the actor has found a way to express, or a quality we wish we were able to project ourselves. There is no uniform definition of "great acting." We are equally willing to appreciate a chameleon and a movie star. Many great character actors can disappear completely into a role without leaving a celebrity footprint behind while being fully believable and relatable for an audience. Many stars make careers playing their own projected personas over and over again, but do so with such charisma and investment that we admire and enjoy their work even though we recognize consistent features in every character they play. The unifying feature in both of these examples is our readiness to believe in the character we are presented with and to relate to the immediate experiences of that character in the story being enacted.

What draws us into a great performance is not far removed from the qualities that Stanislavski set out to define over a hundred years ago. These qualities are consistent across different conventions and styles, they are adaptable for different actors, and while they can be defined and explained individually, their expression is the collective measure of what we call "talent" in an acting performance. What are the elements of talent for an actor? While different teachers place greater emphasis on different elements, most return to variations of the list below.

Training and conditioning of actors, as Lee Strasberg stressed, must instill

enough “belief, faith, and imagination” to allow an actor to “live through” the demands of the performance.[7] In his book, *Acting Power*, Robert Cohen describes the preparatory work of an actor as the gradual stacking of a set of plates, each with a layer of gradually developed habit and awareness, which can only be carried successfully by an actor who remains relaxed, fully present, and in harmony with their immediate experience while performing. Cohen also draws comparisons to the performance of an athlete, who trains in the physical rigors and patterns of awareness needed to excel at a game, works collaboratively (or competitively) while following rules, finally revealing to spectators – with stamina, strategy, and passion – an investment in the goal of winning.[8]

Elements of Acting

- **Technical and physical proficiencies** (ability to memorize and interpret dialogue, physical awareness and stamina, expressive freedom and flexibility, relaxation and open readiness)
- **Concentrated listening and situational awareness** (presence and commitment)
- **Invested pursuit of character needs** (intentions and objectives)
- **Vulnerability and Relationship** (a willingness to be witnessed and work generously with other actors)
- **Communion** (conscious inclusion of audience)
- **Imagination and uninhibited curiosity** (potential for action, the Magic If’)
- **Consistency with details of the character’s world** (given circumstances)

For a student interested in being a good actor, any checklist (like the one above) can be a trap. The formula that Stanislavski was searching for largely eluded him in his lifetime. There is no single trick that an acting teacher can offer to instantly awaken an actor’s talent. There is no shortcut or hidden secret to be revealed. That said, systematic exploration of work defines the spine of how contemporary acting can be understood and provides areas of discovery for actors to explore.

Technical and Physical Proficiencies

To begin the work of acting, there are essential skills. An actor must be able to absorb dialogue from a script and learn to decode, analyze, and understand the language used expressively by and about the character. The mental challenge of memorizing language is largely taken for granted as an acting skill but is not an insignificant obstacle for many performers. Memorizing a few lines of dialogue can seem effortless, but memorizing five acts of Shakespearean text requires time, discipline, analytical skills, and dedication.

Much like how the actor's mind must be conditioned to absorb and express language, an actor's body must be flexible enough to use gestures, physical actions, and movement to freely communicate needs and intentions. Most fundamental training that actors undergo begins with awareness of physical tension and the capacity to recognize and release blocks, patterns of inhibition, and physical mannerisms that limit expressive flexibility. Disciplines from yoga to martial arts, from dance to strength conditioning, are used in conservatory training to help actors develop the stamina and physical awareness to use the body as a performing instrument. An actor's awareness and physical presence is rooted in sensing themselves in space, oriented around a physical center and an aligned connection to the ground. Actors are well served by the capacity to feel and demonstrate different movement vocabularies, tempos, and qualities. How an actor arrives at this level of kinesthetic awareness matters less than its compatibility with the demands of a role or the capacity of the actor to adapt physically to new challenges. In some acting traditions, training is primarily built around physical conditioning. One rationale for deeply physical training of actors – such as the teachings of Jerzy Grotowski or Tadashi Suzuki – is that physical exercises that push an actor to the limits of endurance naturally integrate body, breath, and a physical connection to intentions. This threshold can disrupt unconscious patterns of physical tension in the body and overwhelm conscious efforts to control or inhibit the performer's experience.

An actor's breath and voice are also foundational tools, not only for the expression of language but also for the full release of physical and emotional energy through action and gesture. Too often, beginning actors will timidly memorize the text of a scene or mimic gestures of staging only to discover that when they fully commit themselves to play the intentions and actions of a

scene, their preparations fall apart. Actors need to learn the essential reality of rehearsal, which is that acting is about the investment and conditioning of the body, the voice, the breath, and the mind so that performing is possible without hesitation or lapses of concentration or endurance. Rehearsal is not just a mental exercise it is also a fully physical one.

Listening and Situational Awareness

Lee Strasberg's ideal of "living through" the demands of a performance revolves around the actor's awareness and perception of their character's perspective. When an actor listens in character, they are listening with the needs and intentions of the character as their priority.

They are not *showing* the audience a character. They are concentrated on attuning their awareness to what is relevant to the character's needs in the world that surrounds them and responding accordingly.

In his book *The Actor and The Target*, Declan Donnellan emphasizes that unblocked acting needs a target, meaning that an actor's concentrated awareness is intent on influencing something or someone *outside* of the actor.

> The active target locates the energy outside us so that we can then bounce off it, react to it, and live off it; the target becomes an external battery.
>
> So, instead of always wondering "*What am I doing*?" it is more helpful to ask "*What is the target doing*?" Or better "*What is the target making me do*?"[9]

For beginning actors, this outward focus is often an inversion of their learned experience. Actors on stage are frequently self-conscious and self-aware. They know they are being observed and suspect they are being judged. Worse, they feel a responsibility to demonstrate something emotional or effortful to anyone observing their "acting." The response is often to "indicate" the emotional energy for the scene without considering the actions or immediate needs of the character. Preoccupation with the self misses the most fundamental job of the actor – to remain outwardly aware, attuned to an external target, and

actively processing new information gathered from the behavior of others and the unfolding events around them. All this listening has the purpose of stimulating believable actions and responses. It also requires an actor to let go of control of how they are perceived by an audience and focus on what they are attentive to from the character's point of view.

Invested Pursuit of Character Needs

Stanislavski referred to a hierarchy of character **objectives**, that function as guideposts for the actor's work. Other terms – needs, intentions, goals – have been used to describe this principle, but the central notion is the same. On stage – as in life – people *want things*. Sometimes they are motivated by petty desires or casual preferences, sometimes they are moved by deeply invested goals. If we pursue an intention, it is normally because we believe that achieving that intention will reward us going forward in some way. We typically seek out positive outcomes and tailor our behavior to reach that outcome.

Robert Cohen models this idea around the challenge of a person running away from a bear. His point is that the person in that predicament is less likely to think about why they are running and more preoccupied with the future goal of escaping and overcoming any immediate obstacles in their path. Rather than thinking about why "this bear is making me run away" (which certainly explains his motivation) the fleeing man is thinking "How will I get into the cabin? How will I be able to open the door when I get there?"[10] During a performance there is little value for an actor in thinking about what has motivated their behavior. That self-analysis does not stimulate action. Activating thoughts are built around strategies for positive forward progress.

When an actor is preparing a performance, the intentions of the character aim toward a positive future outcome that the character imagines is achievable. Even if the *actor* knows that the outcome will not be successful, the immediacy and urgency of the performance rely on the commitment of the actor to the *character's* belief in achieving this positive future outcome.

Vulnerability and Relationship

One of the most misunderstood parts of acting is the value of emotional expression and availability. Actors are often eager to demonstrate their capacity to provoke an emotional response. But being able to cry on cue, or express rage or joy, is not the primary task of an actor. The first task of the actor is to commit to the truthful pursuit of the characters' intentions. The obstacles that block or challenge the character/actor and the urgency of the pursuit will give natural expression to the emotional realities of a scene. This revelation is not as easy as it sounds. We tend to mask our true feelings or inhibit their full expression when we do not feel completely safe. It is a practical strategy for most people to avoid public vulnerability or intimacy and we often equate it with weakness or fragility. The idea of being exposed, of having our intimate feelings laid bare, is a terrifying prospect that most normal people assiduously avoid. But most people are not actors.

The peculiar reality for an actor is that vulnerability is a creative superpower. When actors are uninhibited, they allow their impulses to guide their actions, behavior, and emotional responses in performance. The emotional editor that holds the actor's inner life at a distance from others is suspended. Instead of indicating an emotional state and trying to demonstrate the feeling of the character, the actor is free to live the authentic emotional response awakened by the lived experience of the character. For the audience, there is an honestly expressed emotional reaction in the character that is relatable and authentic. For the actor, there is the freedom to channel an authentic physical and emotional response through the experience of a character without lingering real-life consequences.

For young actors learning to trust their impulses on stage, a valuable signal may be that moment of fear or desire to recoil away from a feeling or an action that feels risky or unsafe. Sometimes the rational mind will kick in and say, "this is not a good choice for this character because it makes me (the actor) feel unsafe." This reaction may be a signal from your ego-preserving brain that you are about to expose your true feelings, but in the context of acting, what is really being exposed, from the audience's perspective, is the emotional truth of the character. If the actor can welcome that vulnerability, and lean into that fear, they can learn to trust that authentic feelings awakened by actions on

stage are precisely the connection an audience needs to relate to, believe in, and empathize with a character.

The most important connection of trust and vulnerability in theatre is the one between actors on stage. In an ensemble that values authentic performance, actions on stage are not simply played by other actors, they are deliberately pursued to affect and render changes in the relationships between characters. Between actors, changes are absorbed and responded to on a physical and emotional level, thoughts and intentions are lived experiences, and emotional responses are immediate. Scene partners, through rehearsal and performance, reveal themselves to one another directly, and the intimacy of that relationship relies on trust. As with any intimate relationship, the deeper the trust, the easier it becomes for actors on stage together to freely communicate and play intentions that are true to the circumstances of the scene. When a relationship on stage becomes electric, it is usually because the levels of communication between the actors are complex, vulnerable, and dynamic.

There are important guardrails to this approach to vulnerability. An actor who plays their emotional inner life is not robbed of the agency, or responsibility, to protect themselves or other people in the theatre. Taking emotional risks in reliving trauma, or allowing physical risks or harm to overpower sensible choices about action and choreography is not good acting. In some cases, it is abusive behavior. Trust between actors must be earned, valued, and reciprocated. The rehearsal period should allow gradual experimentation with vulnerability, and in dramatic situations of physical violence or intimacy, there are sensible methods that build trust and establish boundaries for actors to play safely in moments of deep vulnerability.

Communion

When actors move from the preparation of roles in rehearsal to the performance of characters before an audience, a new relationship is created. Even while the preparations are underway, actors must begin to think about their task as not simply living the part, but also sharing that experience with an audience. There are practical considerations: can an actor be seen or heard from every seat in the audience? Is the scale of action and movement on stage

discernible? Is vocal expression and articulation intelligible and believable? In contemporary theatre, a wealth of technology is available to manage audibility. Actors working for television and film are faced with very different challenges of scale and natural behavior than actors working on large stages for Broadway or in the West End. Despite these variables, the one thing that all of these actors must face and integrate into their performances is an audience.

For actors in live theatre, audience reactions and attentive awareness provide an immediate source of information. An audience breathes, laughs, and reacts in concert with the performance, or it falls away into distraction, coughing, or disinterest. Restlessness is audible, feet shuffle, programs flutter. The response and reaction of a live audience is a barometer for the capacity of a play to reach and fully engage the attention and interest of an audience. For an actor on stage, the presence of the audience can be felt as an integral part of the living action on stage. Even if the fourth wall – that imaginary barrier between the world of the play and the audience – is intact, the actors must play on stage remembering that the audience is an included member of every conversation.

For actors working before a camera, this awareness of the audience is not entirely absent. What differs is the scale and energy of what is revealed for the audience to observe and absorb. The learned skill of acting for the camera is to allow the camera itself to do most of the work. For actors trained to scale their expression to a live theatre audience, the internal work of acting is no different before the camera. All that really changes is the proximity and focused observation of the audience. Gone also, when an actor works before the camera, is the immediate feedback of audience reaction, the moments of attentive silence, laughter, or collective exhale that signal response to a performance. Actors in mediated performance are often on a journey to simplify and give private access, but they are never fully without an audience, it is simply represented by the viewpoint of the camera.

Imagination and Uninhibited Curiosity

Many teachers of The Method emphasized an idea put forward by Stanislavski suggesting that an actor could (and should) use memories of past experiences to create authentic emotional connections to circumstances within a scene.

Stanislavski himself was methodical in his approach to defining objectives and obstacles for a character. Both as an actor and as a director he demonstrated his belief that the lived experiences and memories of the actor were the best resources to incite realistic behavior on stage.

One actor and teacher who broke with this methodology was Mikhail Chekhov, the nephew of playwright Anton Chekhov and an actor recognized by Stanislavski himself as among the most talented performers of the Russian stage. Chekhov worked closely with Stanislavski at the Moscow Art Theatre for 16 years, but the volatility of his imagination and creative energy was a constant source of friction with the more systematic teachings and ideas of Stanislavski. Ultimately, Mikhail (later Michael) Chekhov left Russia for the west, shifting through Berlin, Paris, New York, and England before landing in California in the 1940s. His ideas about acting, related through teachers of his work and his own writings, included several important divergences from Stanislavski designed to empower actors with greater faith in their own imagination and the physical expression of thought. He asserted that the Creative Imagination was the actor's most powerful tool and that a vivid, flexible, and detailed imagination could not only guide an actor through the emotional journeys of a character's experience but could surpass the expressive limits of memory and experience. For Chekhov, the imaginable possibilities of a role were an expansive canvas for exploration and invention. He also believed in a close association between imagination, physical sensation, and the power of gesture to awaken action and intention, both in rehearsal and in the delivery of a performance. Chekhov advocated for the use of **Psychological Gesture** as a non-intellectual pathway to directly connect the physical energy and imagination of the actor to the expression of character.

As a guidepost for contemporary actors, Chekhov's ideas add another piece to the puzzle for the exploration of character and invention. Actors need vivid imaginations and a fierce curiosity about the invented possibilities within a role that can enrich and enliven a performance.

Consistent Awareness of Details of the Character's World

It is a fitting counterpoint to the importance of impulse and imagination to

recognize that actors are also obligated to preserve a consistent reality for their characters. For any role, the **Given Circumstances** of the scene connect the actor's work to a set of parameters within which they must confine choices and decisions about the character. An actor cast in a play from a particular time period, with specific relationships, and a defined history, must incorporate – through research, observation, and detailed analysis of the script – details of that world and patterns of behavior that sustain both the substance and the context of the character's life. This can lead actors through elaborate stages of character research and development as they learn to understand and internalize how a character thinks and lives within the framework of the world. The more detailed and specific the knowledge gathered by the actor, the more freely the actor can incorporate those details into the actions, perspectives, and world views of the character.

Careers and the Professional Realities of Acting

Film and television have catapulted actors to the heights of celebrity, but the business of acting is far from being a sure path to fame and fortune. In the United States, the professional union for stage actors, ***Actors Equity Association***, typically records levels of unemployment among its members above 90%. For most working actors, the primary work of their careers is the process of auditioning for work and only a limited amount of time is spent actually working under contract as actors on stage. Very few stage actors can afford to specialize, and most compete for work in all kinds of media, from voice-over and motion-capture work to commercials, industrial film, internet production, and motion pictures.

For actors who have dedicated significant time, resources, and effort to training, career marketing, networking, and the building of a professional career, the odds of success by any definition – a living wage, consistent employment, stable careers, fame, wealth – are, at best, remote. This situation is exacerbated by the broad perception that entry into careers in acting is an effortless lottery for which the only skill or preparation that is needed is a readiness to be "discovered." The simple fact is that the businesses supported by the work of actors are so glutted with people willing to work that the

establishment of stable careers is a rare accomplishment. Many, if not most, professional actors balance more than one source of income, including flexible day jobs, second careers that provide stable access to health care and benefits, or independent employment that is more lucrative and stable than the actual work of being a professional actor.

This dire employment picture has done little to discourage a steady flow of talented performers moving into, through – and often – out of the industry. The tasks of this professional journey are often built around the tools of self-promotion and access to employment – headshots, websites, reels, relationships with casting agencies, and union affiliation. Beyond that, a sub-industry of classes, coaching, marketing help, and career management has evolved that frequently does more to siphon off resources from hopeful actors than it actually adds to their potential for employment. Many actors entering the field after success in local or academic theatre spend a period of time struggling before shifting their life goals and moving into new careers. Others find a balance that allows professional work to trickle in while a second career allows for stable subsistence. Another large group discovers that the pathway of professional acting is less rewarding than the opportunities to continue practice in the art form in local community theatre, occasional regional employment, or involvement with voluntary arts organizations that both educate and support arts programming in their communities.

For actors able to advance in the profession, lucrative employment opportunities do exist. Concentrated centers for live theatre performance are dominated by New York City and the theatres on and off-Broadway that offer the greatest public exposure and highest pay rates for stage actors. The minimum weekly salary for an Equity contract on Broadway (in 2022) is just over $2000. While some actors can command higher than the minimum, most actors are making dramatically less if they are employed outside the commercial theatres surrounding Times Square. Broadway productions are also performed on tour, with actors traveling between runs at regional "roadhouses," commercial theatres that host touring productions in major cities across the country. Those same cities are likely to support locally-based, non-profit regional theatres that hire professional actors, paying weekly salaries based on their seating capacity and projected box office earnings (League of Regional Theatre weekly salary minimums ranges from just over $600 to just under $1400).[11] Outside of major urban centers, smaller theatres are able to

operate under developing theatre contracts or employ professional actors as guest artists. Those contract minimums do not offer much above the hourly equivalent of minimum wage in most parts of the country, though they do allow professional actors, who work steadily, access to health care coverage and retirement benefits.

For commercial theatres, and larger non-profit theatres that rely heavily on steady revenue from ticket sales, the consistent delivery of the "product"– regularly scheduled performances – has established some safeguards that also provide employment opportunities for actors. Professional theatres frequently employ understudies, swings, and standby performers to safeguard their performance schedules and ensure that every role is covered. **Understudies** are typically actors already performing in a production who are also expected to learn other roles in the show. In the event that another actor is unable to perform (for example, due to illness), the understudy is expected to step in. Typically, that situation creates a domino effect in which other actors move into new roles for that performance and a **swing** steps into the production to cover any role that is needed. The **swing** may be expected to learn a wide range of smaller roles in the show and to be ready on short notice to arrive at the theatre to cover a performance. For many large Broadway musicals, for example, the coverage of each performer's "track" through the show typically involves periodic rehearsals and adjustments once a show is open and running. For open-ended Broadway runs – often slated for eight performances a week – actors may be employed for a period of time and then leave the production, setting up a situation where new actors are brought in and the system of coverage is reshuffled without disrupting the continuous delivery of performances. Quite literally, this process is built around the expectation that "the show must go on."

A similar arrangement may employ a **standby actor**, who learns a role and observes performances by a principal actor, so as to be ready to step in and cover that part in a production without disrupting the assignments for the rest of the cast. The challenges of producing live plays in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic drew attention to this support system, particularly on Broadway, where actors were subject to constant testing as a condition of employment, and understudies and standbys were frequently pressed into service to keep productions going. Not all professional theatres employ understudies, since it is only cost effective when the lost revenues of a

cancelled performance outweigh the expenses and logistical challenges of keeping a team of actors rehearsed and ready to perform on short notice.

Actors in film, television and evolving digital media forms benefit from the substantial earning potential of mass media releases. Not surprisingly, the center for this part of the industry is Los Angeles, but the employment reach of these media giants is international. Most professional actors working in mediated formats are governed by the ***Screen Actors Guild–Association of Radio and Television Artists* (SAG–AFTRA)**, though several other labor unions have overlapping jurisdictions. For the actor seeking a lottery ticket of discovery, work in this part of the entertainment industry is the most promising path to short bursts of high income, but the challenges of breaking into and sustaining a career in this competitive branch of the industry as an actor are difficult to overstate. Since our celebrity-obsessed culture is quick to identify and reward actors, athletes, and entertainers who reach the financial pinnacle of success, their success stories can seem deceptively normal or attainable. For every one actor who does become a household name, hundreds – and possibly thousands – of others end up diverted away from viable full-time careers as performers.

For young actors setting their sights on careers on stage or in front of the camera, these dire realities may seem deeply discouraging and, to be honest, they are. That said, the work itself is deeply rewarding and the challenges of building a career as an actor – while daunting – offer opportunities for self-discovery and adventure, unlike other "safe" career choices. Many, from recklessness or determination, still choose to take the risk and commit themselves to careers in acting. For a lucky few, possessed not only with talent, but also drive, ambition, resilience, self-discipline, charisma, and extraordinary adaptability – the dream might come true and will be worth the attempt. For these same people, *not* taking the risk to pursue a professional career in acting would be a lifelong regret.

Setting aside the bleak employment picture for dedicated careers as professional actors, the study of acting is a broadly beneficial experience that supports the development of valuable skills. Trained actors are very employable. Experience as an actor builds confidence with public performance, communication, empathetic awareness, and improvisation. Physical training strengthens vocal and physical expression and decreases anxiety when dealing with public performances or presentations (a frequent requirement in many

professional careers). Memorization of language and physical movement, comfort with collaborative behavior, and ancillary experiences with artistic expression through music, dance, and other performative forms are consistently enriching experiences that yield broad social and professional benefits difficult to derive from other formative experiences. Like the self-disciplinary and physical benefits associated with athletics, a robust exposure to experiences and training in the performing arts is not simply good preparation for a wide range of careers, it is also life-enriching, regardless of a person's vocational path or professional goals.

KEY WORDS

Actors Equity Association

Aesthetics

Aristotle

Catharsis

Character

Conventions

Given Circumstances

Imitation

Impersonation

Magic If

Mask

The Method

Mimicry

Performance

Presence

Psychological Realism

Objectives

Obstacles

(Constantin) Stanislavski

Screen Actors Guild/American Federation of Television and Radio Artists

Stand by actor

Swing

Understudy

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6 The Director

Kiara Pipino

Who is the Director?

Peter Stein, a famous German director, defined the director as the "first audience member." Let's see what this means and how this affects a production.

When putting up a show, there are several elements that need to come together: the script, the performance space, the technical and design elements, and the acting. With the advent of realism in theatre in the 19th century, theatrical productions grew more complex and required an external perspective to assess and coordinate all that was supposed to happen on and off stage. While the actors are "the face" of the production, they can't be fully aware of what happens around them, resulting in a lack of a clear and fully realized picture of what the audience experiences. On the other hand, designers tend to have a different approach to the process and do not regularly attend rehearsals.

The director is there to supervise and make sure that the production is cohesive and that everything the audience sees fulfills a specific artistic concept. It's a bit like a recipe for some delicious dessert: the ingredients must be of the greatest quality, of course, but what makes it successful is the balance among the ingredients. The director's job is to establish that balance. The director is like the pilot of a ship: he/she/they need to have leadership qualities while also being a great collaborator.

A Little Bit of History

The director is a relatively new profession in the theatre business. Historically, there is no mention of a director—in the way we think of that position today—

until the second half of the 19th century in Europe. Classic Greek theatre featured actors, producers, and playwrights working together on the productions and very often the playwright wore several hats to fulfill their vision. A reminder that Greek theatre had a fairly simple structure, with few actors who played several roles by switching masks, in a playing space with almost no scenic design. The actors performed in open spaces, amphitheaters, facing the audience to better facilitate the projection of the voice. While we are aware of the level of complexity reached in the choreography of the chorus, the actors themselves relied almost exclusively on the text. The spectacle—a key element in the Aristotelian script analysis tied to the Classic Greek tragedy—was mostly provided by the music and the *Deus-Ex-Machina* (literally "God Out of the Machine), a primordial special effect that allowed a visual representation of the divine intervention to resolve the plot. For example, in Euripides' *Medea*, the title character flies out to Athens on the Chariot of the Sun and leaves behind a desperate Jason, mourning the loss of his children and new bride.

The Romans also didn't have a director. What is known is the presence of someone who functioned as a manager, who supervised production needs such as venues and would coordinate the necessities of the actors. Frequently, the theatre manager was part of the company and involved in the production as an actor. This evolved into a more structured engagement and empowerment of the actors when theatre started to become a profitable business at the end of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. By then, theatre companies relied on a certain number of company members who each had a specific role. *Commedia Dell'Arte* troupes were often populated by families, and everyone did a bit of everything, from sewing costumes to performing. Shakespeare and Moliere had their own companies. Aside from writing, Shakespeare was a producer, an actor, and what we might consider in a way, a director.

The biggest step towards introducing the professional director happened at the end of the 19th Century—around the 1870s—in Europe, where **Georg II, Duke of Saxe Meiningen** introduced a completely different approach to a theatrical production. Georg II created an ensemble of actors, formerly a company, and started working on a more naturalistic aesthetic. Following the new ideas coming from Ibsen and Stanislavsky, he focused on cultivating a more relatable style of acting and creating an overall more cohesive production. He claimed that what happened on stage, behind the proscenium arch, needed to represent a world of its own. If the text was written in another period, actors

were asked to rehearse in period-style clothing to be true to the script. The scenic design was also more complex and truthful to the styles of the play. Georg II's attention to detail truly made a difference in the theatrical environment of the time, and his productions gained fame throughout Europe. We might think, because of his attention to how everything played a role in the overall outcome of the show, to consider him the first director.

In modern times, directors have grown more and more popular, and while not essential, as we have learned from previous chapters, it is a rare occurrence today to attend a production created without a director.

The Director Today

Directors come from different artistic paths. It's unusual to start off as a director, it's rather something you *become* as you develop your theatrical career. Some directors come from acting, others from playwriting, and others from producing. Although nowadays there are undergraduate and graduate programs devoted to training theatre directors—hands-on experience is always what makes the difference. It goes back to the concept of theatre as an art form and a craft: there is a conceptual and interpretative side to it, but the practical one is just as important. You may have the best ideas, but they are useless if you can't translate them to the stage.

Directors need to have a certain knowledge of all aspects of a theatrical production, from script analysis to acting, as well as technical and design elements, because although the director will not actively work exclusively in those distinct areas, he/she/they must know how they function and might work together. Directors need to possess leadership qualities and be effective communicators and collaborators. Directors are the glue that keeps everything from falling apart. Directors deal with crises of all sorts but must maintain a clear and objective perspective on what is happening on and off stage.

Finally, directors aren't credited much by the critics—unless they do a really bad job, which is ironic—and the audience rarely comments on the direction of a show. In reality, if you have enjoyed the show in its entirety and couldn't see the hand of the director, that usually means that the director has succeeded. If

the show fails, there is a good chance that the director has something to do with it.

Peter Brook

Step by Step: The Director's Job

Step 1: Get Very Familiar with the Script

Like everyone else involved in a theatrical production, the directors need to know the script inside and out. This phase requires the director to read the script several times and research anything that isn't familiar. Script analysis is crucial as well; it is vital to know how the play functions in its entirety and how the characters develop, interact with each other, and how their individual roles push the story forward. The play depicts a fictional world, but if the playwright did well, that fictional world follows the same logic as reality, and therefore it is important to trace the cause and effect relationship connecting the chain of events. Having a clear idea of what goes on in the play will facilitate the director's interactions with virtually everyone else involved in the production. Actors will discuss their character's motives—why they are doing certain things — with the director upon which they both need to agree. Designers will refer to the script to support their design choices for character and scenery.

In the case of contemporary plays, it is not unusual for the director to establish and develop a strong and ongoing collaboration with a playwright. This kind of collaboration, whenever possible, is very fruitful to both parties as it allows the director to have firsthand support when trying to figure out the nuances of the play. Similarly, the playwright has the ability to hear someone else's unbiased opinion which might lead to rewrites and clarifications in the script. There are several cases where directors and playwrights have developed a strong bond and the playwright would only entrust a certain director with their play. Artistic kinship is an important element in theatre to this day. Think about producer, author, and actor Lin Manuel Miranda, for example, who has developed most of his work with virtually the same team of actors, directors, and designers. Tennessee Williams, for example, trusted director Elia Kazan above all others and many of his plays were developed and first produced through a tight collaboration with Kazan.

It is of the utmost importance that a director respects the script for what it is and serves to tell the playwright's story. This is particularly vital when it comes to modern and contemporary plays, as twisting the meaning of a play could infringe on copyright rules and lead to sanctions or, even worse, the production being closed down. When the play is in the public domain, i.e., when the play isn't covered by copyright any longer, the director could exercise

more freedom in interpreting the script and bringing it to life.

Step 2: Interpretation and Concept

When the director has developed a strong knowledge of the script, he/she/they start working on their own artistic construct. At this stage, the director interprets the script by answering these questions: what does this mean to me? What does the playwright intend to say? What is the meaning behind this story? Why is it important to tell this story? What do I want the audience to walk out of the theatre thinking about?

Interpreting something is very common for everyone, and you don't have to be a director to do it. We read an article in the newspaper, and we interpret it. We read a novel, and we interpret it. We hear a song, and we interpret it. Interpreting is innate— it comes naturally when we are faced with any narrative. Out of the whole story, we pick out elements that are meaningful to us, upon which we build our experience of the narrative. Sometimes, what we experience is a metaphor for something else. Interpretation will help us find those metaphors and understand them.

The moment we re-tell the story and recreate the narrative, our interpretation of it plays a decisive role. That is what makes each production of a script unique: each director will have a different reaction to the text, which results in varying interpretations of the same story. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has had thousands of productions since it was first produced in 1599. Yet, each production is different due to unique interpretations and their resulting artistic choices.

The answers to all of the above-mentioned questions lead the director to begin building a **concept** for the show. The concept needs to address all aspects of the production and provide an overall harmonic aesthetic. This stage happens early on in the production and long before rehearsals commence. The director meets with the designers and discusses the concept in what is known as a **production meeting**. In most situations, there are several production meetings completed before rehearsals and some during the rehearsal process as well. The first production meeting is really the moment for the director to share his/

her/their interpretation of the script and vision for the production. The designers also bring ideas to the table and share their own interpretations. It is important that everyone listens to everyone else in the room: the most successful productions profit from the artistic input of everyone, and while the director has ultimate authority on artistic decisions, he/she/they are usually a good collaborator and are open to different takes on the script. By the end of the first production meeting, the creative team must reach an agreement on the concept so that each designer can start working while the director finalizes his/her/their ideas for casting.

It is the director's job, at this point, to compile a character breakdown that includes the playwright's facts along with the director's ideas about the characters. At times, the director provides ideas about what the actors should prepare for the audition, like specific monologues or suggestions about the style (classic material vs contemporary material). This document is to be shared with the production team and the stage manager to be circulated amongst the actors' community. The actors will then learn what is the director's approach to the character and what roles are available for them to audition for.

"*What is an auteur*?"

As we have seen, the director bases their decisions about concept, interpretation, and audience experience around the playwright's intended story. Though sometimes, the director's vision holds as much weight as the script, providing the production with multiple layers of artistry. If this happens, the director is referred to as an ***auteur*,** a French word meaning "author."

Auteur directors tend to have a very specific aesthetic vision as artists, which leads them to interpret the script through that lens. For example, American director **Anne Bogart** has worked with her own company, SITI, the Saratoga International Theater Institute, to produce and direct plays utilizing a technique called Viewpoints, which focuses on very specific patterns of movements. The *auteur's* approach is never supposed to be disrespectful to the script and playwright but tends to use the script as a tool to support the concept.

Step 3: Auditions!

Auditions are a big part of the director's job. It is usually believed that good casting has a strong correlation to the success of the show, which makes the audition process fairly stressful for the director and, of course, the actors. Depending on the kind of production, auditions can vary in size and protocol, but the overall gist doesn't change: actors come in one at a time to perform a piece in front of the director, the stage manager, and possibly other people in the production. Once the actor is done performing, the actor leaves the room. That's it! This is usually what happens in what is known as a general audition.

In the professional environment, for example in the New York City area, Actor's Equity Association requires producers to arrange **Open Calls**, which are (very) large **general auditions** that give producing theatre companies the opportunity to see hundreds (yes, that is usually the number) of actors regardless of their current production needs.

Open Calls are known to be excruciating for everyone involved: they start very early in the morning, with the actors signing up in the wee hours of the day, and finishing in the late afternoon/early evening. Open calls are nicknamed "Cattle Calls" as while they do provide a precious opportunity for professional actors to be seen, it is generally not the expedited route taken by the director to cast a show, and also because directors don't necessarily attend Open Calls. In commercial theatre— Broadway theatre— Open Calls are attended by producers and casting directors almost exclusively. If an actor stands out, the casting director or the producer will arrange for that actor to audition directly with the director of the show.

New York is probably the most competitive market for actors and theatre in general. Productions have tight schedules— time is money!— and the director isn't tied to a contract timewise until the start of rehearsals. This is why producing theatres rely on a casting director to skim through the crowds of actors and present the director with a more manageable group of potential candidates for the roles. The **casting director** is someone who works closely with talent agencies and who is very familiar with the acting scene in that particular location. A good casting director can understand from the director's character breakdown who is potentially best suited for the roles and is able to bring the director only a few options per role. Casting directors are very popular on and off Broadway and are very common in tv and film because, as one can imagine, the scale of those productions is wildly different.

Outside New York or other major cities, professional theatres organize their own general auditions according to their needs and to the director's requests. As the information reaches the actors, they contact the theatre directly to sign up for it. Nonprofessional theatres and theatre departments in educational institutions follow this same concept.

When the general audition is over, it is the task of the director to make choices about roles. It is quite rare that an actor is cast right out of a general audition – unless he is Hugh Jackman or other celebrities of the kind, who by the way, don't go through the general audition anyway. Directors tend to select a few options per role and call those actors back for another round of more specific auditions, called **Callbacks.**

During a Callback, actors are provided the material, usually from the show they are auditioning for, and might be paired up with other actors according to the needs of the script. Depending on the production, Callbacks can be more complex than general auditions. For example, actors might be required to sing or dance if they are called back for a musical. Or if the production has a need for a specific skill—like juggling, fighting, fencing, or playing an instrument — the actors will be asked to perform that skill as well.

Callbacks can take longer than general auditions as actors might be called at different times according to everyone's schedule and needs; but by the end of the process, the director must come up with a cast. In the professional world, this would be when actors receive the offer for the role, which is accompanied by an economic offer and a contract.

It is important to know that while the director makes the artistic choices about who is in the cast, he/she/they are not in charge of the bureaucratic side of what follows: contracts and economic negotiations to close the deal are handled by the producer. This is an important element, as relieving the director from the economic side of the project allows him/her/them to discuss artistic choices with the actors exclusively. Similarly, the director has nothing to do with any of the technicalities relating to rehearsal spaces, arranging actors' schedules, and things of the like. The producer will be providing a rehearsal space— and a venue for the show come opening night— and the stage manager will take care of the communication with actors.

Step 4: Rehearsals

Once the show is cast, and the actors have all accepted their roles, the production is ready to hit rehearsals. Depending on the size of the production and whether or not it is a professional one, the director and cast will meet to work on the play for a period of two to six weeks prior to the scheduled opening night.

The first day of rehearsals is a big day! Everyone is excited and nervous at the same time. This is the first time the director has the opportunity of sharing his/her/their thoughts, ideas, and concept with the people that will bring it to life for an audience. This stage of rehearsals is usually called **tablework,** as the director and the actors read and discuss the play while sitting at a table. This is a delicate step, as the director needs to clearly outline his/her/their vision while allowing the actors to contribute their own ideas It is said that the director provides the actors with a sandbox (the concept), and the actors are free to create their vision for the character *within* that sandbox. The director is there to guide the actors in their process and should be able to assist them by answering questions about their characters when needed.

During the course of rehearsals, the director has the most interaction with the actors and with the stage manager. This is the time when the show "comes to life", the time when discoveries are made and the storytelling is physicalized. We mentioned at the top of this chapter that the director needs to be a great collaborator. In this phase, it is particularly true. As much as the director's concept can be strong, at the end of the day, it is the combination of everyone's efforts that make it a reality and the actors are front and center in this process.

Learning how to talk to actors is crucial, so it occupies a significant portion of the director's training. A director needs to learn what to say to an actor to allow them to translate their note into his/her/their performance. Yelling orders left and right *can* be an approach— and unfortunately, sometimes, it is— but it isn't a strategy that will prove successful in the long run. If an actor understands why and how the character does a certain thing, the actor will be able to replicate the performance consistently. On the other hand, if the actor does something solely because the director said so, and lacks understanding of what motivates that choice, they will not be able to consistently replicate it. That

being said, the business is full of all sorts of directors. The majority are very supportive of the work of the actors, yet others are more pragmatic in their behavior, and there are some who are downright dictatorial. Although creating a collaborative and communal environment in the theatre is key, there are more than a few famous stage directors who are well known to be very firm about their choices, and while their reputation – particularly in the professional world – precedes them, ultimately the director serves the play first and foremost. If at some point hard decisions need to be made, like letting an actor go and re-casting the role or anticipating a stand-off with the producer on some marketing choices, the director must be ready to proceed in that direction.

It is not unusual for directors to work with the same group of actors, as it helps expedite the process. If the actor and the director have worked together before, they have already established an efficient way of communicating artistic ideas: the actor has a hunch about what the director is looking for, and the director has an idea about what the actor can deliver. Yet, it is important to understand that while directors and actors might become friends, the hierarchy must be sustained. The Stage Manager helps with that; for example, he/she/they are in charge of enforcing rehearsal etiquette, whatever that might be for the production, and is the person facilitating schedules, handling conflicts, and enforcing discipline during rehearsals.

Rehearsals are also when the director blocks the show, creates the stage pictures, and takes care of **transitions. Blocking** is all the movement the actors do on stage. The director and the actors need to agree on where the actors are placed in every scene, at any given time. When finalized, the pattern of the movement is then memorized by the actors and marked down by the stage manager in the production prompt book. Blocking is dictated by several elements, one being the character's necessities. For example, character A needs to enter the room, sit on a sofa and drink a coffee, considering the particular way the stage and the scenic design are set up, as well the audience's perspective. This last element is a specific concern for the director, to make sure actors do not "upstage" themselves, meaning they are not visible to the audience.

Example of Stage Picture. William Shakespeare's Pericles, produced by Prague Shakespeare, 2022. Photo by Kiara Pipino.

Stage pictures are a visual element that, similar to a painting or a tableau, can give audiences information about characters, such as their status and relationships. Stage pictures are representative of the essence of a scene, and they encapsulate the meaning and the soul of that beat in a singular frame. When building stage pictures and blocking the show, the director provides focus on who and what needs it the most at any given time. For example, center stage and down center stage—close to the audience—are the two most powerful positions If a character requires the undivided attention of the audience at a specific moment, the director will place the actor center stage.

When we read the reviews of a production in a newspaper, we usually see pictures of the show. Those pictures are provided by the press office of the production and are still frames of the stage pictures. If you think about it, when you see pictures of a stage production, they immediately evoke an emotional response and provide you with a sense of what that moment is about. If the director is successful at creating stage pictures in the show, the photos of the production will show it as well.

Transitioning a scene into another might require technical adjustments to the set and costume changes, leading to "dead" time. Nothing is more detrimental to a production than the suspension of storytelling for technical needs, as that breaks the illusion of reality that the playwright so desperately tries to establish. The director's job, in this case, is to coordinate the transitions in a way that makes them either seamless or very much intentional and recognizable. If set pieces need to be changed, sometimes the director will want the actors to execute this change, while other times crew members, dressed in black or wearing a base costume of some sort, will enter the stage and take care of it. Transitions almost always happen on a less lit stage and aim to be as fast as possible. Think about F1 races: long pit stops can guarantee a pilot's loss. In theatre, a lengthy transition will disconnect the audience from the storytelling. Seamless transitions are extremely fast—a matter of seconds—but are only achievable either in minimalistic productions or, on the other hand, in highly automated theatres, where everything can be moved literally by just touching a button.

Example of Stage Picture. Lauren Gunderson's The Revolutionists, produced by SUNY *Oneonta Department of Theatre. 2021. Photo by Kiara Pipino.*

Yet, regardless of the set requirements, it is not to be forgotten that actors might also need time to change costumes. This factor might influence the duration of a transition. It is to be said that costume crews are specifically trained to handle "quick changes," and costumes are built in a way to facilitate the change. For example, buttons on a costume are sewn on just for show, and Velcro is used for fastening, which expedites the costume change by a long shot. The director is notified of complex costume changes during production meetings, so he/she/they can think ahead of time of a way to let the actor exit the stage at the best time possible.

The visual flow of the show is made by blocking, transitions, and the succession of stage pictures, which all fall under the umbrella of the director's composition of the show.

The final ingredient for the successful direction of a production is determining its proper pace or rhythm. This is a delicate task for the director, as while it is not advisable to rush the actors there is nothing more treacherous than dead time on stage. If nothing is happening on stage, if the actors linger too much on their lines, the urgency of the moment dissipates and the audience loses attention. On the other hand, going too fast might cause the audience to miss text, and even key elements of the plot Once again, if the audience's attention is interrupted, for any reason, it will be challenging to get it back. The director needs to ride that fine line between too fast and too slow and settle into a pace that feels organic and natural to the actors and audience alike.

While rehearsals are in progress, the producer might want the director to be part of the marketing end of the process, so the director himself/herself/themselves must be available for those discussions. That might entail speaking to the press or promoting it by talking directly to the community. This is also true for actors, particularly when the production features celebrities.

Step 5: Tech Rehearsals, Dress Rehearsals, Opening Night

The journey to opening night continues with **technical rehearsals**— or tech rehearsals— that start about a week prior to opening. During these special rehearsals, the director needs to focus on integrating all of the design and

technical elements of the production. It is at this stage, in fact, that the designers bring in their finalized projects, including sets, props, lights, microphones, and costumes. Up until now, the cast rehearsed with rehearsal props, with a base look for the lights, and wore rehearsal costumes.

During technical rehearsals the director's attention shifts from the actors to the whole ensemble of the production. Clearly, every part of the design has already been discussed and approved by the director during production meetings, but seeing it on paper might be very different from seeing it live, combined with all other elements. Adjustments might need to be made as a result of unforeseen situations, which are coordinated by the director who keeps in mind the ticking clock that counts down the days until **opening night.**

Remember: the director is the first audience member, and he/she/they have the responsibility of making sure that what the audience experiences will be what was envisioned and planned for.

Technical rehearsals can get very long and tiring for everyone involved. Nerves are tested and it is crucial that the director prove themselves to be a good collaborator and leader.

The last three rehearsals before opening night are called **Dress Rehearsals** and are when the production is run under showtime conditions. Under showtime conditions mean it needs to look, sound, and feel as if it were opening night and the audience was in attendance. At this point, the director must look through the objective lens of an audience member and take in the show as if he/she/they were experiencing it for the first time. The final touches could determine the success or the failure of a production!

During Dress Rehearsals the director rarely —or never— gives notes to the actors. On opening night, the director's job is done. After working on the production tirelessly for several weeks, everything is turned to the stage manager, who will be calling the show and interacting with the actors and possibly the producer on a daily basis.

No matter what happens to the production during its run, the director is rarely called back. Even if an actor needs to be replaced— this happens on Broadway shows quite often, as actors move from one production to the other or have "limited engagements"— it's the stage manager who is responsible for bringing

the incoming actor up to speed with blocking and directing notes that were previously gathered during the course of rehearsals.

Lastly, commercial theatre and productions of new plays and musicals include a series of runs where the audience's purpose is to assess how the show lands and if anything, mostly regarding text, needs tweaking. These runs are called **Previews** and tickets for these dates are sold at regular prices. During previews, the director is present in the theatre to see how the audience reacts to the production. If changes need to happen to better the show, they can happen during previews only. When it comes to Broadway shows, previews are the norm and can go on for over a month.

Once the show officially opens, there can be no more changes to the script or the staging. Opening night is also when theatre critics can see and review the show. The response of critics also determines the commercial success of a production in the form of reviews, blogs, and media coverage. In New York, the *New York Times* is by far the most reputed voice when it comes to theatre criticism. In fact, many shows have seen spikes in ticket sales following a glowing review… and many shut down shortly after a less flattering review.

Difference Between Stage Directing and Film Directing

For actors, shifting from the stage to the big screen doesn't require a completely different approach. Yes, the technique is different, but the approach to the character and to the storytelling stays the same. For directors, on the other hand, the two mediums have completely different rules and require different skill sets.

As we have seen for stage directors, they are provided with a script and he/she/they have to interpret, create a vision for, and tell that story chronologically in just "one take." When the show opens, the actors perform it every night in the same way it has been conceived and rehearsed. Because theatre provides a live experience, each show is never actually exactly the same

as the night before as it changes and adjusts to whatever happens during that specific run. If an actor is feeling low, that actor's performance might be slightly different; if the audience is very responsive, the show might be more energetic; some technical elements might fail, forcing actors to get creative about a solution. The circumstances are endless. The point is: from the moment the curtain rises in a theater, the show is on, and the story must be told without stopping—unless something really catastrophic happens— until the final bows. This is one of the reasons theatre requires the actors and the director to spend time developing a relationship of trust and mutual assistance. The director needs to enable the actors to replicate the same performance under all possible circumstances, all while supporting their creativity, personal investigation of character, and problem-solving.

On a film set, the scenario is completely different. First off, the relationship between the actors and the director is generally way less personal. Of course, there are famous actors and directors who have worked together on many projects and therefore have developed an ongoing professional collaboration and friendship; but it isn't unusual for the actors to step on set on the day of the shoot and meet the director for the first time. That means that all their character development work must happen prior to the shoot, seldom times without much knowledge as to what the director intends to do or is looking for. In order to be ready for any possible scenario, actors tend to prepare the scene in many different ways, counting on the fact that at least one of them might be the one the director is looking for. Some actors don't even get to see or talk to the director at all.

The nature of the film is dictated by variables that also differ greatly from the theatre environment. For example, shootings happen in several locations, often far from one another and at different times of the year. To accommodate those needs and make ends meet economically, the production might not be shot chronologically. This is a challenge for the actors and for the director alike. For the actors, it is a challenge because they might be asked to shoot the end of the movie first and then go back to the beginning— think of the most recent movie adaptation of *Les Misérables*. If that happens, the actors are not able to "use" the personal journey of the character throughout the course of the story to support and fuel their emotional status at the end of the movie. On stage, they get that option. For the film director, that translates into a much clearer and specific vision of the whole project and a detailed knowledge of the

opportunities— unique to filmmaking— provided by technical elements, such as different cameras and lenses, special effects, aftereffects, CGI [Computer Animated Imagery] and so on.

Most notably, the movie is pieced together at the very end, behind closed doors, and almost exclusively by the director during what is called post-production. Actors are not present during this phase. At this time, the director goes through all the takes and selects the ones that best suit his/her/their vision for the storytelling, edits them, and places them into the sequence. Out of all the shots filmed on set, the majority don't even make the final cut. This feature makes filmmaking the director's medium, as they are the one person who truly decides everything. Most times, actors don't even know what the final cut will look like until the first showing of the film!

The Dramaturg

At times, the script explores a topic that is so specific it requires more in-depth research than usual. As we have mentioned, research is something the director does at the beginning of the process to better understand the play. Yet, there are times when the director will need someone who is either an expert on the specific topic the play is about or who is a skilled researcher. This person is the dramaturg.

The dramaturg comes from varied backgrounds and provides the director, and sometimes the actors as well, with research packages to support and ground their work. The dramaturg tends to attend rehearsals in its early stages, during table work, and is available during the course of the production for further investigations.

Established theatre companies usually have a resident dramaturg as part of their literary department, and that person is there to assist directors for all the companies' productions.

Interview with Casting Director Alaine Aldaffer

[redacted]

KEY WORDS

Anne Bogart

Auteur

Blocking

Call Backs

Casting Director

Concept

Dress Rehearsals

General Auditions

Georg II, Duke of Saxe Meiningen

Open Calls

Opening night

Peter Brook

Previews

Production Meetings

Stage Pictures

Tablework

Technical Rehearsals

Transitions

7 The Producer

Kiara Pipino

In a theatre production, the producer is the one person that "makes it happen" financially. Depending on the kind of production, the number of producers and the roles they take on may differ, but generally speaking, they are in charge of finding and providing the necessary funds to put the show on its feet for a run.

Historically, the producer has always been in charge of the economic side of a production. In Ancient Greece, the *polis* (city) of Athens was responsible for funding the shows included in the theatre festivals. The playwrights also had a part in it, being responsible for raising money and, at times, acting in their productions. In Rome, people in occupations resembling theatre managers took care of the logistics. In the Middle Ages and up to the Renaissance, theatre troupes were usually formed by families and every company member played a role in the management of the performances. In the Renaissance, theatre companies became more structured, with a clearer distinction between the function of each member. Successful theatre companies would aim to own their own theatre, so they could produce their plays without worrying about finding a venue and paying rent. This was, for example, Shakespeare's case, as his theatre company, the King's Men, owned the Globe theatre on the left bank of the river Thames in London – in a location close to where the new Globe theatre stands today. Shakespeare is well known as a playwright, but he also managed his company and functioned as the producer.

In modern times, the producer bridges the artistic side of the theatre business with the "outside" world: the world of finance, grants, donors, and investors, with the goal of raising the funds necessary to produce a show. The process of producing a show usually starts with the creatives, such as the playwright or the director, who approach the producer with their idea or project. If the producer likes it and thinks it is feasible, the wheels start to turn, and people start getting hired. It is the producer who hires (and fires) everyone involved in a production, and the producer is also the one who deals with stipends. This allows the artists to avoid discussions of money as they create, rehearse, and work, giving them the utmost creative freedom. The actors or their agents, for

example, won't have to negotiate their salaries with the director of the show and this helps keep the integrity of the artistic process in place.

Producing in Commercial Theatre

First, let's analyze commercial theatre, and the producer's role in it. We consider "commercial theatre" to be any theatre production that is conceived for larger audiences and intended to generate a profit. Broadway shows in NYC are a good example. As of 2022, there are forty-one Broadway theatres in New York, and a lot of them are owned by a few producing organizations, such as the Schubert Brothers (owning 17 theatres), The Nederlander Organization (owning 9 theatres on Broadway, 3 in London and 5 in Chicago) and the Jujamcyn Organization (owning 5 theatres on Broadway). Shows such as *Wicked*, *The Lion King*, or *Hamilton*, have been running on Broadway for several years now, always playing to full houses. These shows function on a larger scale in almost all departments and therefore require a much larger budget. Commercial theatre producers face the challenge of finding investors and raising enough money to sustain the production. The producers need to promote the show as an investment, like stocks and bonds, and need to be able to provide potential investors with as much data as possible about the potential outcome and profit of the project. As mentioned, Broadway shows cost a lot of money, and even when the show is up and running to full houses, it usually takes time before they break even, let alone to generate a profit. It could take years before the investment pays off. For investors, that is quite risky! Oftentimes, if a show isn't on the right earning trajectory, producers will shut it down to minimize the losses. Broadway is full of examples of shows that closed almost overnight, leaving actors and crews alike out of a job with little to no warning.

Once the producer has raised the money, he needs to budget all of the expenses, including but not limited to: the cost of the rights for the production, the costs of the material to build the set and costumes, the cost of the publicity, the cost of any technical equipment needed (projectors, motorized elements, lights), the cost of the rehearsal space, and the rental cost of the theatre, plus all the stipends for everyone involved – from actors, to designers,

the director, the stagehands, those who work the front of house, among others.

The producer is an active participant in the artistic process as well, although it is usually up to the artists, such as the playwright and the director, to finalize the artistic choices. At times, producers would contribute to the casting, for example, to secure famous actors who would provide greater visibility, and potentially a greater economic return for the show.

Because there is so much at stake on Broadway, producers will often look for shows that were successful in similar markets, such as the **London West End**. Several shows that have opened and successfully ran in London for some time later moved to Broadway. Examples include *Cats*, *Les Miserables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, *Miss Saigon*, *Spamalot*, *Matilda*, *Six*… the list could go on. It is also common for Broadway producers to be more attracted to producing musicals rather than straight plays, because although the costs of a musical are higher, the economical reward might be higher as well.

Another "trick" producers use to test the success of a show prior to opening on Broadway is to do a "test run" in a city other than New York, such as Boston or Chicago, to gauge the reaction of audiences and critics. *Kinky Boots*, for example, first opened in Chicago and only later moved to Broadway. *Moulin Rouge* premiered in Boston, and then moved to New York.

In the past few years, another common feature for Broadway productions has been to adapt successful movies into theatre pieces. Examples include *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Tootsie*, *Frozen*, *Pretty Women*, *Groundhog Day*, and *Catch Me if You Can*.

For Off-Broadway productions, producers will need more contained budgets due to the different scale of the theatre itself and the nature of the plays that are being produced; but nonetheless, the itemized costs are the same as that of a Broadway show. At times, shows are also tested Off Broadway prior to a Broadway transfer. Again, this is a way to figure out the potential success of the show before committing to a much more expensive Broadway run. Very successful shows originated that way, including *Hamilton*, *The Band's Visit*, and *Sing Street*.

It is important to remind you what we mean by Broadway versus Off-Broadway

theatre. The distinction has nothing to do with the quality of the productions that you might see in those theatres, but rather on the number of seats available in each venue. A **Broadway theatre** is the biggest theatre in the city, having more than 500 seats in the audience. An **Off-Broadway theatre** seats between 100 and 500 people, and finally an Off-off Broadway theatre has less than 100 seats. In NYC, Broadway, Off-Broadway, and **Off-off Broadway theatres** are scattered all over Manhattan and Brooklyn. Non-commercial theatre – or nonprofit — operates in a slightly different way due to the different scope of their mission. Regional Theatres all around the U.S. are a perfect example of this. They usually have a board, which nominates an **Artistic Director** and a **Managing Director**, who are then in charge of operating the theatre from the artistic and economic point of view. The Artistic Director oversees the selection of shows to be produced in the entire seasons and at times he/she/they also directs some of them. The Managing Director, or Executive Director, keeps the books in order, reaches out to donors, applies for funds, and writes grants. Both the Artistic and Managing Director work closely together to make sure that the production is artistically fulfilling and economically safe.

There are over 1400 **Regional Theatres** in the U.S. All of them have their own season and produce their shows in their own spaces. Some theatres have multiple stages, thus allowing different kinds of productions to run at the same time. Some of them are more interested in new works, such as the Berkley Repertory Theatre and La Jolla Playhouse. Regional Theatres will hire professional theatre artists and actors, along with non-equity actors. Regional Theatres could be part of LORT (League of Resident Theatres), which is an Association that promotes and helps theatres negotiate with the actor's union – Actors' Equity – while also providing resources when it comes to funding, management, and legal matters. Currently, LORT includes 75 theatres in the U.S.

Producing in Nonprofit & Amateur Theatre

Differently from commercial theatre, nonprofit theatres are not bound to make a profit, but they still need to make sure that their productions are

economically viable and could break even. Nonprofit theatres can also function as incubators for future Broadway productions, meaning they could be the first ones to workshop and produce what would later become a larger show. One of the most famous Broadway incubators is American Repertory Theatre (ART), based in Boston and currently directed by Diane Paulus. Shows such as *Pippin*, *Waitress*, and *Once* originated there and then moved to Broadway.

Finally, a few words need to be spent on amateur theatre, as it plays such a vital part in communities all around the U.S. Amateur theatre includes **Community theatres** and **college/university theatre**. What defines amateur theatre is that the people involved in the productions are not necessarily theatre professionals. In a Community theatre, for example, most people are volunteers with a passion for theatre, who hold other jobs. In academia, you might have a mixture of professionals and amateurs, since the faculty involved in the production usually has a professional theatre background, while the bulk of the artists, such as the actors and the crew, are formed by students. They might become professionals in the future, but they are still working on it! In academia, the producer is usually the Theatre Department, which is, at times, helped by a student organization. Yet again, amateur theatre has its own producers as well because even though there might not be professionals involved and who are paid a stipend, there are still costs to cover for the rights, the materials, and the publicity.

National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is a public agency of the federal government that was created in 1965, with the goal of promoting and financially supporting excellence in the arts and in arts education. Non-profit organizations, including theatres, can apply to get financial support for specific projects, but unfortunately, NEA has limited funds and it cannot alone guarantee the complete economic feasibility of a project.

Awards & Accolades

The Tony Awards

The Antoinette Perry Award for Excellence in Broadway Theatre – commonly known as the **Tony Award**— is meant to recognize the excellence in Broadway productions. It is promoted by the Broadway League and the American Theatre Wing. It is the equivalent for theatre of the Oscars – The Academy Award for film. The award started in 1947 and since then it has become the most prestigious recognition for theatre artists working on Broadway in all the different aspects of a theatre production.

Currently the Tony Award features 26 categories, and awards both straight plays and musicals. The categories include:

- Best Actor (in a Play or Musical),
- Best Director (of a Play or Musical),
- Best Original Musical,
- Best Scenic Design (of a Play or Musical),
- Best Choreography,
- Best Play,
- Best Revival of a Play (and of a Musical),
- Best Costume Design (of a Play or Musical).

The award ceremony is a huge event which usually takes place in June in NYC and is televised. Famous actors who received the Tony Awards are: Cynthia Erivo (for *The Color Purple*, in 2016), Renee Goldsberry (for *Hamilton*), Lin Manuel Miranda (for the Book of *Hamilton*), Denzel Washington (for *Fences*), Viola Davis (for *Fences*), Neil Patrick Harris (for *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*), Audra MacDonald (for *Lady Day*), Andrew Garfield (for *Angels in America*), Katrina Lenk (for *The Band's Visit*), Nathan Lane (for *Angels in America*), Billy Porter (for *Kinky Boots*), James Corden (for *One Man, Two Guvnors*) Hugh Jackman (for *The Boy from Oz*), Jefferson Mays (for *I am My Own Wife*).

As of 2022, the show that has won the most Tony Awards is the 2001 production of the musical *The Producers* – winning 12 Tony Awards. It is followed by the 2016 musical *Hamilton*, with 11 wins. The 2022 Tony Awards for

Best Musical was awarded to *A Strange Loop*, while the Tony for Best Play was awarded to *The Lehman Trilogy*. You can find out more about the awards, categories, and winners on the Tony Awards website.

Off-Broadway Awards

Off-Broadway productions are recognized by their own awards, such as the **Obie Award** (originated in 1956), the **Drama Desk Award** (originated in 1955) and the **Lucille Lortel Award** (originated in 1986). These awards are just as prestigious as the Tony Awards, and feature just about the same categories. Since 1976, West End Theatre in London is recognized by Society of London's Theatre **Laurence Olivier Awards**.

A Conversation with Broadway Producer Hal Luftig

2

KEY WORDS

Artistic Director

Broadway Theatre

College Theatre

Community Theatre

Hal Luftig

Lucille Lortel Awards

Managing Director

National Endowment for the Arts

Obie Awards

Off-Broadway Theatre

Off-off Broadway Theatre

Olivier Award

Regional Theatre

Tony Awards

West End

1 https://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/19/movies/theater-review-all-right-everyone-smile.html
2 https://www.halluftig.com

8 The Playwright

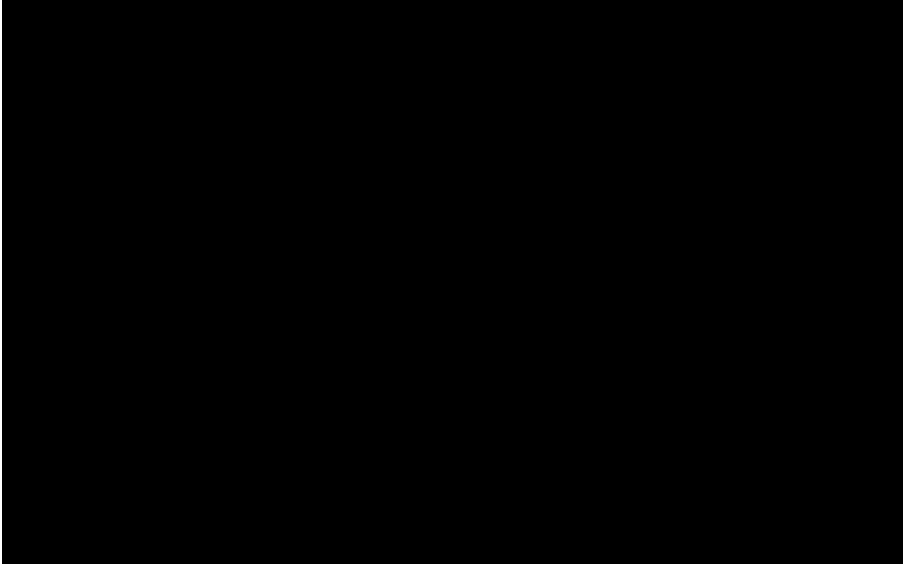
Ingrid De Sanctis

We seem to have a voracious appetite for stories. Thousands of years ago we gathered around the fire to share what happened during the day. In our present world, we consume stories in all sorts of ways. We buy subscriptions to Netflix, HBO, Apple TV, and other online streaming platforms. We listen to stories on podcasts ranging from topics about reality stars to the latest news. We go to the movie theatre or watch movies on our smartphones. We read poetry and novels and keep the New York Times bestseller list in motion. And we continue to go to the theatre to see plays.

Unlike a novelist who writes for the page or a screenwriter who writes for film or television, playwrights write for the stage. As a student, you may first encounter a play as words on a page, but this is only the beginning of the journey. Plays are meant to live in a three-dimensional form. Because a play is a live experience with a new audience each time, it can never be repeated in exactly the same way. Playwrights are not fully satisfied until their plays move off the page and are embodied by actors on a stage in some way, shape, or form. When playwrights are writing, they understand they are in collaboration with actors, directors, and designers as they all build the play for an audience to encounter.

In this chapter, you will learn how playwrights build plays using the foundational elements of playwriting, the career of a playwright, and meet a professional playwright TJ Young, who will share his ideas about the future of playwriting in the 21st Century.

Why Playwright and not Playwrite?



A Bit of History

Playwrights have been making an impact on audiences ever since the first plays were performed. The earliest playwrights not only wrote the text but also cast and directed their own productions. During the Elizabethan Age, playwrights like **William Shakespeare** re-invented the English language, expanding with at least 1,700 new words still used today. The emergence of realism during the nineteenth century took over theatre in western Europe and continues to shape the way we tell stories.

When Irish playwright John Synge's, *The Playboy of the Western World*, premiered at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin on January 26, 1907, instead of applause, the audience threw potatoes at the stage and rioted in the streets. The play was described by Irish party leader Andrew Griffith, as "a vile and inhuman story told in the foulest language we have ever listened to from a public platform." When the play moved to New York in 1911, applause was again replaced with hurled potatoes and riots in the street. How did the playwright experience this reaction to his play? "It is better any day to have the row we had last night than to have your play fizzling out in half-hearted applause? Now we'll be talked about. We're an event in the history of the Irish stage," he wrote in a letter to Molly Allgood.

The former President of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel started out as a playwright. As a young man, he worked in the theatre as a stagehand and eventually became the resident playwright of the Theatre of the Balustrade company in 1968. During the Soviet reign, his plays were banned because they criticized totalitarian politics. Despite being banned, his two-person play, *Protest*, about a political activist, continued to be performed in living rooms in private homes. He was arrested numerous times, spent four years in prison, and eventually became the president of Czechoslovakia.

Playwright Tony Kushner wrote the two-part *Angels in America* in 1993. Set in New York City in the 1980s during the AIDS crisis, the play focuses on Prior who abandons his gay lover who has AIDS, and Mormon attorney Joe Harper, a closeted gay man and Republican political strategist. When it was scheduled to be produced at the Charlotte Repertory Theatre in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1996, it was met with protesters, particularly from the religious community disturbed by the nudity in the production. In the play Prior takes off his robe and stands naked as his nurse checks the legions on his body from AIDS. It was suggested to playwright Tony Kushner to adjust the nudity, but such changes would violate licensing agreements and copyright laws, so no changes were made. The board of the performing arts center threatened to cancel the production. Charlotte Repertory Theatre responded by charging the board and officials with a violation of free speech, Judge Marvin K. Gray of the Superior Court ruled in favor of the theatre and the show went on. All this press did not deter the audience from attending and the theatre sold more seats in one day than in its entire history.

The Pulitzer Prize winning play *Fairview*, by Jackie Sibblies Drury, centers around a middle-class black family. Initially, the play resembles a sitcom, but as it progresses, the play's shape and form shift. By the end, Keisha, the teenage daughter, changes places with the audience. This physical shift and Keisha's final monologue created strong responses ranging from anger, fascination, and discomfort. On Twitter, one audience member reported, "7 people walked out, mid-play, 50ish people stayed for the talkback, prepare to be challenged." Playwright Jackie Sibblies Drury responded to this audience reaction In a *New York Times* article, "A lot of people who have been upset by it have also intellectually engaged with it and I don't know that being upset is wrong." In his review of the play in the *New York Times*, Ben Brantley wrote how the play is "a glorious, scary reminder of the unmatched power of live theater to rattle, roil

and shake us wide awake."

Playwrights may want to amuse their audience in comedies like Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple* about two opposite personalities living as roommates. They may want to disturb their audience as in the husband-and-wife battle that makes up Edward Albee's, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? As we explore the elements of playwriting, keep in mind how plays become three-dimensional events for an audience. They start in the mind of a playwright with the hopes of ending on a stage somewhere to create discomfort, discoveries, laughter, applause, or even a potato.

How do Playwrights Build Plays?

Theatre is a collaborative art form and, at some point, designers, directors, actors, stage managers, and the audience will interact with the script, often without the playwright in attendance. Months or even years before that happens, plays are created in the minds of the playwrights; a solitary process. How do they begin?

Here are the elements playwrights consider when building plays:

- THE STORY
- THE DRAMATIC STRUCTURE
- THE CONFLICT
- THE CHARACTER
- THE DIALOGUE
- THE STAGE DIRECTIONS
- THE JOURNEY

Think of a play as a room with eight doors. To begin writing, a playwright can walk through the door of character or maybe hear something on the street, and they walk through the door of dialogue, or maybe they want to write a play that feels like a collage, and they start with structure. Whatever door they enter, playwrights consider these elements when they are building their plays.

The Story

Every playwright starts with a **story**. The plot is different from the story. The **plot** is the events from the story that the playwright chooses to include in their play. Where a playwright chooses to start the play is called the **point of attack**. The start of the play may be early, so there's not a lot of backstory, or it can be very late, meaning a lot has happened before the play begins. Quite often, there's a secret from the story that happens before the play starts, but gets revealed during the dramatic action of the play. **Exposition** is the tool for playwrights to reveal the information that happened before the play began.

The way in which the playwright structures the plot, or the way in which those events are sequenced, is called the **dramatic structure**. When building a house, an architect creates a blueprint based on the needs of the homeowners. In a similar fashion, the playwright determines a structure for the play based on the needs of the plot. This dramatic structure is the organization of the scenes, how the conflict is explored, when characters are introduced, the events that happen in the play, the climax of the plot, and how the play is resolved. Maybe the playwright will choose to use flashbacks or dream sequences as well.

For instance, the play *Stop Kiss*, written by Diana Son, is structured out of order. The main characters, Callie and Sara, become friends. Slowly their friendship evolves into a romantic connection. A hate crime takes place against one of the characters and changes both of their lives. Scenes in the play go back and forth in time and the playwright masterfully reveals the backstory scene by scene. There is a detective who investigates the crime, a boyfriend who is trying to understand what has happened, and other scenes all taking place before and after the incident. The hate crime itself is not one of the scenes that happen in the play. The playwright ends the play with the kiss, the moment before the assault takes place. By the time the audience arrives at the final scene, they know what is about to happen after the kiss, but instead of violence, blackout.

As you continue to encounter plays, you will find they are built in a variety of shapes and sizes. The length of the play will be determined by the needs of the plot. Sometimes the story needs ten minutes, sometimes the story needs three hours with an intermission, sometimes the story needs ninety minutes without

an intermission. Some plays take place in one location with few characters, others take place over years in multiple locations, and others may have a more poetic structure and take place in an altered universe. Most contemporary plays fall into one of the following categories: one acts, ten-minute plays, full-length plays in one act, or full-length in two acts or three acts with an intermission.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *The Humans*, written by Stephen Karam, is a one act without an intermission and runs 90 minutes. At one time in history, playwrights were encouraged to write plays that observed what were called the "unities" of time, place, and action. Unity of time means that the play happens in real-time. Unity of place means that the play takes place in one location. Unity of action means there is only one plot, with no subplots or characters in separate scenes that don't interact with one another. In *The Humans*, a contemporary play that observes the unities of time, place, and action, patriarch Erik Blake travels from Pennsylvania to lower Manhattan to celebrate Thanksgiving at his daughter's apartment. During the Thanksgiving meal, the family discussion reveals the challenges they are facing, ranging from illness, religion, and generational differences. In this old run-down apartment, the conversation is intensified by horrific surprises. You will have to see the play to find out what happens!

The Conflict

When we think about **conflict**, we may think about an argument with our mother or a misunderstanding with our best friend or a recent breakup. These interpersonal conflicts exist in plays, but there is also a larger conflict in place within the structure of a play. Plays are built around a primary character who wants something that is difficult, or nearly impossible to achieve. In pursuit of what they want, characters will confront obstacles. The obstacle is what stands in the way of what the character wants most of all. The bigger the obstacle, the more tension or resistance you have in the conflict.

Plays are conflicted on multiple levels:

- Conflict with another character

- Conflict with self (beliefs, values, goals)
- Conflict with nature (weather, storms, death, time)
- Conflict with society (government, economics, classes)
- Conflict with greater powers (gods, fate)

Joe Pitt is a character in Tony Kushner's play, *Angels in America*, and his circumstances are examples of multilevel conflict. Joe is a gay man who wants to come out of the closet, but is deeply conflicted. He is a law clerk working with famous conservative Republican Roy Cohn and his job would be impacted. He is a Mormon and worried he'd be rejected by his community. As a Mormon, his beliefs are challenged, and he is scared of the God he knows through his religion. Joe is also married to Harper, and he does not know how to tell her the truth, even when she confronts him directly. Joe confronts obstacle after obstacle and, as the play continues, each obstacle intensifies his conflict.

The Characters

Characters are the people in plays. People have personality traits. They also have a backstory, which are the things that happened to them before the play began. The history of the characters impacts how they see the world and motivate them in different ways. Character includes their relationships; for instance, are they a son, a mother, a friend, a student, a daughter? In plays we see characters in heightened moments, often backed into a corner and in need of action. A common adage in the theatre is that plays are life with the boring parts cut out.

Playwrights put a combination of characters together to create collisions to strengthen the conflict. These characters create trouble for each other. In the play, A *Raisin in the Sun*, written by Lorraine Hansberry in 1959, a black family is in conflict on how to use the life insurance money following the death of their father, Walter Younger Sr. Beneatha is the 20-year-old daughter, who is dating two different men, Asagai and George. When she is with George, who is wealthy, educated, and sure of himself, Beneatha is angry and defensive. When she is with Asagai, who is from Nigeria, she is challenged about her choices yet able to process her African identity. Beneatha's dreams, flaws, and personality

are revealed through the collision with these other two characters.

The Dialogue

One of the primary ways in which a play communicates itself is through speech. In novels, the author can write what the characters are thinking and feeling. But in plays, all you have is the words that the characters speak to one another, to themselves, or sometimes even to the audience. **Dialogue** is literally the words that the characters speak in the play and the most important component of playwriting. Plays are unique because the only thing that the audience knows about what is happening is what they see and hear the characters doing and saying.

What are the functions of dialogue?

- Dialogue reveals individual character. How is one voice different from another voice? How does education impact the way a character speaks? The character's vocation, relationship, economic status, needs, and goals are revealed by what they say. Each character has their own unique rhythms and phrases based on their background.
- Dialogue reveals relationships. If they know each other well, they may interrupt or talk at the same time. If one character has higher status, the characters may be more formal with each other.
- Dialogue reveals location. If you are in an office or at the park, dialogue reveals rules of behavior based on the location. If the characters are in a public or private space, how and what is spoken is impacted by where the characters are in the moment.
- Dialogue reveals backstory. What happened before the play started is revealed through what the characters say to each other. Exposition is important to understanding the story. The details and the secrets of the past are woven into the dialogue.

The Stage Directions

Playwright Lauren Gunderson says this about stage directions in her essay, "God is in the Stage Directions":

> "Stage directions are the very reason I write plays at all. Stage directions
>
> are how I fell in love with theater! Watching actors brawl, kiss, grab,
>
> break, weep, clutch, die, soar, exit, enter. The moments that gripped
>
> me are the ones that orbit around a stage direction that propels a
>
> truth-telling action. The truth is what people do, not say. I crave plays
>
> that move, soar, leap, dive, embrace. Give me action, give me bodies
>
> in motion, give me nonverbal communication!"

When you are reading a play, you will encounter **stage directions** (they're usually in *italics*). Through the stage directions, playwrights provide information about the physical life of the play. The action described in the stage directions may include the behavior and movement of the actors, the details of location or scenery, the sounds outside, the props involved in the scene, or even when an actor should pause (what is sometimes written as "beat" or "pause" or "silence".) Characters may pick up a glass of wine or a cell phone, they may be dragging a couch across the room or breaking a dish. When playwrights are writing plays, they are seeing their characters in action on stage. The characters are not only talking, they are moving and communicating through those actions. Note the stage directions in this excerpt from *Big Love* by playwright Charles Mee.

THYONA

You think I need a man to save my life?

[she throws herself to the ground again]

I don't need a man!

I don't need a man!

[she gets up and throws herself to the ground again

and again, as she yells]

These men are leeches

these men are parasites

these rapists,

these politicians,

these Breadwinners,

[she is throwing herself to the ground over and over,

letting her loose limbs hit the ground with the rattle

of a skeleton's bones, her head lolling over and hitting

the ground with a thwack, rolling over, bones banging

the ground, back to her feet, and throwing herself to

the ground again in the same way over and over.

music kicks in over this—maybe J.S. Bach's

"Sleepers Awake! &" from Cantata No. 140 and, as she

hits the ground over and over, repeating her same litany

as she does, Olympia watches her and then she joins in,

and starts throwing herself to the ground synchronously

so that it is a choreographed piece of the two women

throwing themselves to the ground, rolling around, flailing

on the ground, banging angrily on the ground, rising again

and again]

Playwright Charles Mee has communicated the physicality of the moment and the choreography between the characters, Thyona and Olympia. Do the actors playing these characters literally throw themselves on the ground over and

over in production? Must J.S. Bach's "Sleepers Awake! &" from Cantata No. 140 be used at this moment? Must her head hit the "ground with a thwack"? In production, these stage directions may not be followed exactly, but they inform the production decisions. Stage directions are an opportunity for the playwright to collaborate with designers, directors, actors, and the audience when they are not in the room.

The Journey

The journey of a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. At the most basic level, a character starts the play as one person, something happens, and then by the end of the play, they are someone else. A journey requires change. Once the audience knows where they are and who is on the journey, trouble ensues. The ending of a play is the culmination of the journey and a resolution (or continuation) of the conflict. Knowing how to create a satisfying and surprising journey is part of the playwright's work in the writing process. When you go to the theatre, what happens in the end will greatly define your experience. How will the audience react to the end? The ending is what you will be talking about on the drive home or the next morning.

In 1879, Henrich Ibsen wrote, *A Doll's House*, the story of a woman, Nora, who wants to leave her marriage. In the last moment of the play, Nora announces to her husband, Helmer (Torvald) that she is leaving and nothing he does will stop her.

HELMER: All over! All over! –Nora, shall you never think of me again?

NORA: Know I shall often think of you, the children, and this house.

HELMER: May I write to you, Nora?

NORA: No–never. You must not do that.

HELMER: But at least let me send you—

NORA: Nothing–nothing—

HELMER: Let me help you if you are in want.

NORA: No. I can receive nothing from a stranger.

HELMER: Nora–can I never be anything more than a stranger to you?

NORA: [taking her bag]

Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.

HELMER: Tell me what that would be!

NORA: Both you and I would have to be so changed that–. Oh, Torvald, I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

HELMER: But I will believe in it. Tell me! So changed that–?

NORA: That our life together would be a real wedlock. Goodbye.

[She goes out through the hall.]

HELMER: [sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands]

Nora! Nora!

[Looks round and rises.]

Empty. She is gone.

[A hope flashes across his mind.]

The most wonderful thing of all–?

[The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.]

THE END

The sound of the door shutting, as noted in the final stage direction, is the end of the journey. The journey is resolved with a shutting door. An action louder than any words. And this ending rattled audiences in 1879. During its premiere, this play was met by protestors who were insulted by the depiction of a woman who would leave her children and her husband. Women at the time were expected to submit to their husband and being a devoted mother and wife was their primary duty. The play was so controversial that Ibsen was forced to write

a second ending that he called “a barbaric outrage” to be used only when necessary. In the second ending, she decides that the children need her more than she needs her freedom. The last moment in the play impacts how the audience reacts. Will they clap? Will they be still? Will they leave the theatre seeing their world differently? The playwright considers these factors when putting their play together.

A Career in Playwrighting

How does one decide to be a playwright? Maybe they first realized their interest in playwrighting in a university class or at a local theatre. Maybe they knew they wanted to be a playwright since they participated in a production in high school. Wherever it started, writing plays takes time, effort, and an understanding of the craft. Sometimes playwrights go to graduate school to pursue a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in playwriting to hone their craft. Playwrights spend months, or maybe even years writing and developing their scripts. An actor or a director begins their work weeks or months before opening night, while the playwright spends months or years preparing plays for a premiere.

Once the play is complete, what is next for the playwright? There are multiple avenues for a play moving into a production. Many playwrights work on commission. A university, local art organization, theatre, or festival may pay a playwright to write a script about a specific topic. Once their play is complete, their scripts may be submitted to theatres. Throughout the country, there are hundreds of calls seeking plays of different styles and topics. Many of these submissions do not require an agent, and those are called open calls. A playwright sends in their play and waits to hear it if is selected for production. If selected for a development process, playwrights are provided an opportunity to develop their work with a community of artists through conversations, rehearsals, and a festival of public readings. During this process, the playwright may rewrite the script and create a new version or draft. In the process, they may work with a dramaturg, actors, director, and designer to explore the script and assist the playwright in understanding their play.

Paula Vogel teaches playwriting at Yale University and won the Pulitzer for her play *How I Learned to Drive*. In an interview in 1997, she said:

> If you're going to be a playwright, you're going to craft something that lets actors, directors, and designers do their thing with an audience. You provide the structure. The really great playwrights that I love absolutely do that. I think we must have said this in the first week of rehearsal: Words are cheap. They are very cheap. If they don't work, drop them, cut them, change them, it doesn't matter.

When plays are finally produced, playwrights receive a **royalty** for performances and maintain creative control through copyright agreements. These contracts protect playwrights, and no changes can be made to their script without permission. But plays have to be in production to receive royalties and even successful playwrights whose plays are produced nationally need another source of income. Tony Kushner is one of the most well-known and successful playwrights in American Theatre. In a *Time Out New York* article, Tony Kushner acknowledged that his success as a playwright did not generate enough income to make a living for himself. "I make my living now as a screenwriter. Which I'm surprised and horrified to find myself saying, but I don't think I can support myself as a playwright at this point. I don't think anybody does."

Playwrights writing for film and television has become more and more common. For example, Aaron Sorkin is a playwright turned screenwriter. His play, A *Few Good Men*, premiered on Broadway in 1989 and later became a film. He has written *West Wing*, *The Newsroom*, *Moneyball*, and *Steve Jobs* for film and television, to name a few. Most successful working playwrights are working for film and television in addition to writing for the theatre. Yet many playwrights remain committed to theatre and the magic of the live audience reaction and return frequently to the stage.

The Future of Playwrighting

In our most recent history, COVID-19 closed theatres across the world. Productions ready to open were put on hold. In fact, plagues are not new to the theatre. Throughout history, plagues and diseases have closed theatres. Theatre historians have discussed how these shutdowns have impacted the writing of plays, specifically Shakespeare, who wrote some of his most famous plays during his quarantine. When the entertainment industry went online during COVID-19 and theatres shut down, playwrights had time to consider what was needed in the post-COVID world. Theatre artists started to experiment with live streaming of plays and an entirely new form was created—Zoom plays. During this break from live theatre, concerns around the environment, ticket prices, and accessibility rose to the surface for playwrights who were considering the plays of the future.

In the *Los Angeles Times*, Theatre Critic Charles McNulty asked 25 theatre artists, ranging from directors to designers to playwrights, "What will the post-Pandemic stage look like?" Two-time Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Lynn Nottage answered.

> "Optimism is what's dragging me through these pandemic days that have stretched into months. It has given me time to think about how and why I want to return to making theater. It is my hope that when we're able to gather en masse that we rethink the tyranny of the proscenium stage and our dependency on making theater in traditional and exclusionary spaces. No doubt, people will desire robust and healing storytelling, but we have to ensure that we create an environment where theater is accessible to everyone."

With more on the future of playwriting, let's talk with playwright TJ Young.

Interview with Playwright TJ Young

KEY WORDS

Characters

Conflict

Dialogue

Dramatic Structure

Exposition

Playwright

Plot

Point of Attack

Royalties

Stage Directions

Story

William Shakespeare

9 The Set Team

John Bagby

A Brief Introduction to and History of Scene Design

From the very beginnings of Western theatre, scenery has played a role in telling the story, defining the story's location, and creating a world in which the story can live for an audience. The periods in history that shaped our understanding of theatre in the West have had some form of scenery or scenic element as part of the presentation styles. These elements are used to illustrate time, place, social status, and other visual communications.

The Greeks and Romans used the architecture of the theatre itself to create a background while adding elements of mechanical engineering, spectacle, and illusion. These elements took on many forms during this time in history, including wagons, known as the *Eccyclema*, to reveal tableau scenes and other story moments that were not allowed to be staged live, such as murder and suicide. Additional Greek machines included the *Periaktoi*, a triangular rotating column to change decorative backgrounds, and the *Machina*, a crane, used to lower the actors playing a god onto the stage creating the illusion of descending to Earth from above. The Romans took these beginnings to the next level by adding elevators and ramps, full-scale battle reenactments (both land and sea battles), Chariot Races, Gladiator Fights, and multiple levels and entrances to their theatres.

As the Roman Empire ended in the West and Europe transitioned into a different form of governance under the leadership of the Christian Church, theatre came under attack on the grounds of being immoral and evil. Public performance of secular theatre was banned, but theatre found a way to survive. During this period, known as the Medieval or Middle Ages, public theatre was against the law. However, the church used many theatrical elements during

their times of special celebration and ritual holy days. Props, costumes, stage blocking, and scripted passages were used during these religious ceremonies. As time moved on, these liturgically staged stories moved to more public venues such as church courtyards and town squares. Eventually, small scenic buildings, called *Mansions*, were created to accompany a series of staged stories to provide a sense of location. Finally, the stories, props, and mansions were loaded onto wagons and, along with a company of players, traveled from town to town, village to village presenting the staged stories of the church. These traveling groups are known as Pageant Wagon tours and were common from the late Middle Ages into the Renaissance.

As the Renaissance blossomed and population centers grew in both numbers and size, the need for a more permanent and formal theatre space became necessary. It was during this time in history that we witness the beginnings of what is now known as Scene Design. The early theatre spaces attempted to reclaim the ancient glory of classical Greece and Rome. Many of the theatres were designed to replicate the Greek and Roman shape and were designed using large semi-circular seating spaces, marble statuary, and ornately decorated stage spaces with gilded columns and marble decorations. Eventually, these "Neo-Classic" style theatre spaces proved impractical. The evolving styles of storytelling and plays created by the day's playwrights needed less of the old ways and more new innovations. From this was born what we know today as the Proscenium Theatre. It is also during this period we see new styles of painting and sculpture, focusing on realistic representation of both the human form and architecture. It was the use of perspective, a technique used to create visual depth on a 2-D surface, in painting and drawing that revolutionized theatre design during the Renaissance. It is from here that movable full-stage scenery in the form of "Wing and Drop" is started.

From these humble beginnings, scene design has grown into an art form that allows artists to imagine, create, invent, and discover new ways of communicating location, time, and space. Today, we use technology beyond painting, wagons, and simple rigging to change scenery. In the theatre of the 21st Century, we explore a wide variety of technologies including computer automation, motorized curtains, video and image projection to name a few. A scene designer takes on the role of an artist, engineer, carpenter, painter, plumber, computer programmer, visionary, and research historian— plus a few more. Scenery can be real, imagined, projected, symbolic, representational, and

take on many other forms, but it is just one small part of the whole.

The Purpose and Process of Scene Design

What is the purpose of scenery? If one were to ask 10 random audience members that question, I would imagine you would not get very many answers that were the same. *Scenery is an assistant to the story and allows a viewer to see what kind of environment a character inhabits... Scenery communicates time and location… Scenery creates a world for the story's characters to live within… A background….* All of these are valid and useful when thinking about designing a set for a production. That is exactly what designers set out to do. They create a world in which the story can be told, allowing an audience to have a sense of what it was like to live in that world during that time and gain a greater understanding of who the characters are in their lives at this moment.

As mentioned above, scenery can take on many forms today, far more than in days past. That being the case: how does a designer decide which road to travel when creating a design? Much of this decision will lie with the production design team and the director. This group creates ideas that become the creative interpretation for the production. It is the production concept that shapes and informs design choices for the production. If it is decided that the show requires historical realism to accomplish its goal, then the scenery, costumes, props, and other design areas need to create that realism within the finished product. If the group agrees that symbolic elements will best fit the vision, then the designers need to create design ideas to symbolize the needed elements. Whatever the vision or design choice, the scenery will play the role for which it is intended.

The process by which scenery is designed is not too dissimilar to the process the production design team uses when defining the purpose (production concept) for a show. Each design's creation will take a slightly different journey depending on the needs of the production concept, the available resources, and the deadlines to be met. There are, however, steps that will certainly be needed on each design journey regardless of the production concept.

A set designer's act and scene breakdown of a play

Once you have begun to work as the designer on a production, one of the first tasks is to read the play. Along with that reading of the play comes the analysis of the script. During this time of script analysis, the designer makes discoveries that inform and shape the choices made for the design. A designer may read the play multiple times to understand the storyline, to understand the space the play requires on stage, and to understand the characters who live in the space the designer will create. During the readings of the play, a designer may make notes about the needs of the physical space, such as *a front entryway door, a window that overlooks a backyard, the space is filled with refuse and resembles a college dorm room, or graffiti and posters fill the walls.* In addition to making notes about the physical needs, a designer also explores the characters in the story. They may look at a character's wealth, social status, personality traits, habits, and movement through the space. Finally, a designer may have questions about the script or the requirements of staging a moment in the story. This is the time to ask those questions, as the answers may reveal the need for new thoughts or ideas.

After notes have been made and questions have been answered, it is time to begin the research step. Design research may involve many questions to be solved, and some of those questions may have limited answers, but with a good analysis of the play, solutions will be found. Much of the research a designer does is visual. This type of research requires them to seek out paintings, photographs, architecture, and interior designs that support the production concept. Finding the right color, trim detail, or wallpaper pattern is important, but research goes beyond those surface details and allows for constant learning and discovery. In addition to visual research, a designer also engages in historical research. Historical research can open a world of artistic options for a designer and ensure that choices are historically accurate when those details are required.

Following the research comes the selection of details and ideas. The selection brings all the designer's research ideas together and the best choices for the production are selected. With these choices made, the designer can move forward to implementation. This is the moment you start putting pencil to paper, cursor to screen, brush to canvas, and saw blades to wood. The drawings are created, models are built, paint elevations are painted, and from these plans and ideas come the scenery constructed for the production. During this realization phase of the process, designers need to be flexible and willing to

evolve as the production warrants. Not all challenges can be anticipated, so an ability to accept changes is helpful in successfully completing the project.

Scenic Design for DISGRACED, SUNY *Oneonta, Designer: John Bagby*

Finally, the show is open for viewing by a public audience. Many congratulations are in order and feelings of accomplishment abound, but we must also look deeper into what happened during the process of creation and implementation. Where did the scenery come up short of the mark? How can we adjust for the next production to meet the mark? What were our successes? How do we make sure those continue for future productions? In short, we need to evaluate the process, the communication, the collaboration, and any other elements that affected the scenery and the production as a whole.

Design for ONCE UPON A MATTRESS, SUNY *Oneonta, designer John Bagby Design for* ONCE UPON A MATTRESS, SUNY *Oneonta, designer John Bagby*

The Personnel Involved in the Creation of the Scenery for a Production

The **Scene Designer** is the leader of this area of production and is responsible for the visual appearance and function of the scenery and props. In its simplest form, the scene designer creates the artifacts and visual representations of the scenic elements. These artifacts can be produced in several ways and the final artifacts created are the choice of the designer in collaboration with the director.

A designer often begins with quick sketches of the design ideas, the individual scenic elements, props, or other elements as needed. Once the design ideas are agreed upon, the designer will move to a more detailed and technical phase of the design during which mechanical scale drawings are created to illustrate the exact size, shape, and minor details of the whole set. These sets of drawings usually include a ground plan, a centerline section, front elevations of all scenic

elements, and any other drawings necessary for the completion of the production. In addition to research, sketches, and mechanical drawings, the designer may also create a scale model and paint elevations to illustrate the design choice in 3D scale and in color.

Sketch and corresponding ground plan for a scenic design. Images and design by John Bagby. A white card-stock model for a musical set and corresponding painted renderings of a set design. Images by John Bagby.

Assisting the Scene Designer with construction is the **Technical Director** (TD). The TD is responsible for the construction of the scenery and all other technical aspects of the production such as sound, props, and lighting. This does not mean that the TD does all those jobs, but makes sure they move forward safely, on budget, and on schedule. The designer provides the scale drawings of the scenery and, along with the TD, creates a plan for building the needed scenic pieces. There are many factors involved in the building of scenery, including, but not limited to, the show budget, material availability, available labor, and the amount of time allotted for the construction of the scenery.

A detailed construction plan for an element of the Once Upon a Mattress set. Images and design by John Bagby. Detailed construction plan for each of the walls and portals for the Once Upon a Mattress set. Images by John Bagby.

Assisting the Technical Director with their responsibilities is the **Assistant Technical Director** (ATD). This position assists the TD with ensuring the safe, on-time, and on-budget completion of the scenery. The ATD also manages the shop equipment inventory, making sure that the tools used in construction are well-maintained and in good working order.

Partially finished set for Once Upon a Mattress. Image by John Bagby.

Under the supervision of the Technical Director and Assistant Technical Director, the **carpenters** build the scenery using wood, metal, fabric, plastics, or the chosen construction material. Once the drawings are in their final form and the construction decisions have been made by the TD and the Scene Designer, the carpenters, props artisans, and welders are assigned their roles in producing the needed scenic elements. Some artists will take a project from

beginning to end and others will contribute pieces of the whole. Regardless of the role anyone plays, their contribution is important to that piece of the production.

Once the scenery is constructed it becomes time for painting and finishing details. The person who leads the painting application is known as a **Scenic Charge Artist**. It is the charge artist who creates and develops, along with the TD and the Scene Designer, the schedule, color palette, and techniques necessary for painting the scenery. The charge artist is responsible for the completion of the painting of the scenery and props. On most productions this may be impossible alone, therefore most scene shops have a paint crew to assist the charge artist with the painting tasks and techniques. Scenic painters need to be familiar with many types of paints, stains, and dyes, along with many application techniques for faux finishes such as foliage, glass, wood grain, and marble.

A set piece in the process of being painted. Photo by John Bagby.

Prop storage at SUNY Oneonta. Image by John Bagby.

Parallel to the scenery is the Stage Props. Props are details that become extensions of the larger set, the actors, the story, or the costumes. These details are managed by the Prop Shop and led by the **Properties Coordinator**. Props add to the understanding and visual communication of the production design concept. Some props are purchased, some are pulled from storage, some are borrowed, and some are designed and built from scratch. It is the director, the scene designer, the TD, and the props coordinator who decide which avenue to travel for each and every prop required for the production.

Finally, the show is built and prepared to open for a live audience. It is now that the Stage Crew, a group of backstage technicians, take on the task of running the show. It is this group that operates the stage fly systems, moves the scenery and props as needed, and keeps the stage clean, clear, and safe for all members of the production company working on the production.

Scene design and all theatre design is an ever-evolving art form that serves an intended purpose within a production. It contributes to contextual

understanding of the production's environment, creates visual interest and intrigue, plus excites audiences with visual spectacles that capture our imaginations in the process. The scene designer is the artist who imagines the possibilities of the world of the play and creates the needed artifacts to make those ideas a reality.

Up-close of the canvas fastened to a piece of scenery. Photo by John Bagby.

KEY WORDS

Assistant Technical Director

Carpenters

Production Design Team

Prop Coordinator

Scenic Charge Artist

Scene Designer

Technical Director

10 The Costume Team

Bethany Marx

Introduction: The World of Costumes

Costume rendering for Tybalt in Romeo and Juliet. By Sydney Lenoir Roberts, produced at Theatre Emory, 2016.

Costumes are one of the key design components of contemporary theatre and have played a major role in theatre since its creation. In Ancient Greece, intricate masks transformed actors into literal Gods. In Europe during the Middles Ages, historic records show that Mystery Cycles—plays that featured stories from the Bible—budgeted special funds to costume actors portraying God and his angels, even though lesser characters were often costumed anachronistically. In traditional theatre practices across the globe, from Renaissance England, to Japanese Noh Theatre, to Chinese Xiqu (Chinese opera, in English), the purpose of costumes extended further than establishing details about the character to provide the primary spectacle for the performance, as these theatre practices featured almost no scenery and relied on natural or limited lighting. In fact, costumes were the most valuable asset owned by Renaissance Theatre troupes in many European countries.

But it wasn't until the last two centuries, when technology advanced enough to allow for less expensive and faster-produced textiles, that Costume Design began to be tailored to specific productions. An increased interest in historical accuracy in the late 18th Century, and a move towards Realism in the late 19th Century, led theatre artists to start thinking about the psychology of characters and how best to communicate specific information about time, place, and origin to the audience. With these developments, the modern **Costume Designer** was born.

The Purpose of Costumes

While many love costumes for their beauty and creativity, the main purpose of costumes within a theatrical production is to communicate necessary information about the time period and characters to the audience.

> *Imagine you walk into the grocery store and see a man in a suit and leather dress shoes selecting oranges in the produce section. What would your first assumptions be about him?*

You're unlikely to assume the man in the suit is an employee of the grocery store. Our knowledge of the world tells us that most grocery store employees wear some sort of uniform or utilitarian clothing suited to their required tasks. Depending on the time of day, we might assume that he is on his way home from work. But what does he do for a living? Did he choose the suit or is it a requirement of his employment?

Costumes provide us with a glimpse into a character before they have a chance to speak. They allow us to use our knowledge of the world to make assumptions about where we are and who a person is without having to be told. A skilled Costume Designer can even use an audience's inferences to surprise them when a character later does something unexpected. Costumes may be used to communicate a character's personality, wealth or social status, age, sex or gender, confidence level, employment, and more.

Production photo from Colony Collapse, produced by SUNY *Oneonta, 2017. Photo by Matt Grenier.*

Costumes can also work with other design elements to reveal important details about the world of the play, including time period, region or location, weather, time of year, time of day, living conditions, and other important details.

> *Think of an example of how a person's clothes might tell you about the time of year or the current weather. How does what you wear change from summer to winter? How much is that affected by the region in which you live?*

What are Costumes?

Costume rendering for Sarastro in The Magic Flute. Designed by Jenn Sheshko Wood for Utah Festival Opera, 2022.

At this point, we should take a moment to talk about what exactly a **costume** is. If you ask a normal person on the street, they will define a costume as what you dress up in on Halloween or what a child puts on while playing— and they're not wrong. In the simplest terms, a costume is what a person puts on to pretend to be someone else. And there are actually a lot of different types of costumes in our world with their own names and purposes. Renaissance Faire attendees wear complicated "garb," a combination of historic garments and modern traditions established by performers and patrons. Reenactors at living history museums and battle reenactments wear historically inspired or replica clothing to enhance patron experiences and learn more about how people lived in a given time period. Cosplayers recreate clothing worn by their favorite fictional characters to wear to gatherings with like-minded fans.

For an actor, a costume is the clothing they put on to become someone else. Many actors rely on costumes as the final step in transforming into their characters on stage. A good costume design will make them feel authentic and believable. But for the *character* in a play, a costume is not a costume. It's their clothing. This is how a costume designer must think. The costume designer, like the actor, must think of a character as a real, living, and breathing person and clothe them as if their story were truly happening. Characters should be thought of as people with lives, relationships, families, and histories that have come before and will continue after their appearance in this play.

> *Pick a character from a favorite book or show. Take a moment to imagine the circumstances your character lives in. Do they have a bedroom? A closet? A trunk? Does someone do their laundry for them? Can they afford a lot of clothing? Did they buy this clothing, or did someone purchase it for them? Is what they wear their choice, or is someone deciding for them? If they woke up on this particular morning—where our play begins —and walked over to that closet, what would they choose to wear?*

Production photo of "goat woman" costume from The Missing Peace. Designed by Bethany Marx. Produced by Christine Demuth and Stillpointe Theatre, 2016. Photo by Bethany Marx.

Costumes from one play to another will be vastly different because the needs of each play are vastly different. The costume designer must approach each play with the question: How do I best support the story being told? If a costume designer does this, then regardless of the play content, their design will usually be effective and genuine.

The People

Costume Designer

The **Costume Designer** is a member of the artistic team responsible for the visual appearance of the actor. Depending on the size of the theatre and the production budget, the Costume Designer may be responsible for wig/hair, makeup, and costume properties as well as the actual clothing worn. They may also work closely with Wig and Makeup Designers to ensure each character has a unified look. Costume Designers work with the director and other designers to create a production concept, then create costume renderings, research boards, or collages for each character. The designs are shared with the actors and design team, but serve the primary purpose of showing costume technicians how each finished costume should look.

Costume rendering for Dorine from Tartuffe. Designed by Bethany Marx. Produced by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Theatre Department, 2014

Costume Technicians

A costume in progress, 2022. Photo by Bethany Marx

While the Costume Designer creates the look for each character, and often

shops for specific costume items, choose fabrics, and makes final decisions during the fitting process, it is the **costume technicians** working in the costume shop that actually implement the designs for the show. The number of employees, and their assigned tasks, vary significantly based on the size of the theatre. Costume items may be purchased, pulled from "stock" storage from previous productions and altered, rented from another theatre, or built from scratch.

The costume shop is overseen by a **Costume Shop Manager** or Supervisor, who handles scheduling, budgets, supply inventory, and assignment of tasks. A **Cutter/Draper** creates patterns using actor measurements and the costume rendering for each built costume. A **First Hand** is responsible for cutting out the new pattern. The garment is then handed to a **Stitcher**, who sews it together.

Costumes are fitted in an unfinished state before linings, hems, or closures are added. A **Costume Craftsperson,** or Dyer, is often employed to handle non-sewing projects, dyeing of fabrics, and distressing to make new-built or purchased costumes appear older, more worn or damaged.

Large costume shops, such as those that build for Broadway shows or film, may also employ armorers, milliners (hat-makers), embroiderers, beaders, jewelry makers, and other more specialized craftspeople. Costume Designers rely heavily on the skills of the technicians that bring their work to life.

The Process

Script Analysis

The first thing any theatrical designer should do is to read and/or listen to the play. Designers glean the text for themes or ideas present in the script, along with important character and setting information, that includes tangible or explicit details like ages, relationships to other characters, socioeconomic status, etc., as well as harder-to-grasp content like personality, perspective,

and feelings. The costume designer must know the characters as people, so they can help the audience to know them as well.

Collaboration and Conversation

Most characters can be portrayed in multiple ways because, like real humans, they are complex and multifaceted. After reading the play, the Costume Designer needs to meet with the director and other members of the design team to discuss how the play will be approached. The design team will discuss possible time periods to set the play in, important themes to be highlighted, and how realistically the production will portray the world. Once a concept for the play is established, the designers seek out visual research to support their ideas. Research can be anything from actual clothing items, to photographs or paintings of people, to more abstract evocative artwork, depending on the needs of the production.

Contemporary Realism

Plays are never fully and truly real. They are always a copy of life performed for an audience that can never quite forget they are watching a copy of life. But many plays popular today attempt to come as close as possible to replicating life as we know it now or within our recent memory. For a Costume Designer, designing a realistic, contemporary play is a unique challenge. Everyone in your audience will know if a choice is “wrong” since everyone is subconsciously familiar with the popular trends of today. But at the same time, “right” choices are often completely ignored, in the same way that we pay little attention to the clothing worn by our friends and neighbors. A good contemporary, realistic design will essentially go unnoticed.

Production photo from Outside Mullingar, produced at Capital Repertory Theatre, 2016. Photo by Richard Lovrich

Historic Realism

Also called Period Plays, shows that feature costumes from a previous time period but are still meant to represent real life, are sometimes called Historic Realism. These designs make use of historic research, though designs are rarely 100% realistic. Designers must often make use of existing costumes from previous productions and must also consider modern perceptions and aesthetics, as well as more practical concerns, like the actors' ability to move safely when fighting, dancing, or interacting with other actors.

Costume from The Revolutionists. Produced at SUNY Oneonta, 2021. Photos by Bethany Marx

Non-Realism or Fantasy

Few plays are wholly realistic and may contain a mix of various storytelling elements. Musicals, for example, may appear to exist in the world we live in, but how often have you actually had a friend break into song, accompanied by a full orchestra and chorus of dancing couples, all of whom know the harmonies? **Heightened Realism** is when a play is mostly recognizable as reality but contains certain elements that may seem far-fetched or larger than life. These moments are often highlighted by changes in costumes or lighting or even the addition of props or scenic elements that don't otherwise fit the realistic world of the play.

Digital costume rendering from The Birds, designed by Amanda Cardwell-Aiken for a Design Study Course, 2022.

Some plays, however, are complete fantasy and step far away from the real world we know. These productions can offer designers a broader range of creative choices and can be more "fun" to design, but also present their own challenges. Without the boundaries of reality, limiting choices and creating a

unified world is more difficult.

Implementation

Once designs have been finalized, the Costume Designer presents their renderings to the costume shop. The shop must decide, based on the timeline, budget, personnel, and other resources, which designs will be made or "built" by the shop, which things can be bought, and which items need to be pulled from storage or rented from another theatre. Many considerations go into these decisions. Has the theatre company done another play in a similar time period? What sizes are the items available in stock? Is the play in a time period where items can easily be purchased?

The Costume Designer will go on to make purchases for the show, including fabrics, clothing items, shoes, trims, and accessories.

Costume rendering and production photo from Hello, Dolly! designed by Bethany Marx. Produced at the Mac-Haydn Theatre, 2016. Photo by Ann Kielbasa

The Costume Technicians will begin the build process. Costume shops often make their own patterns specific to the actors' bodies rather than relying on commercially produced patterns that can be purchased at fabric stores. Mockups using cheaper fabrics are created first to ensure the costume fits well and accommodates the actors' movements. The costume is then built a second time using the actual fabric. The Costume Designer is usually present at final fittings to ensure the finished garment matches their vision for the character.

During Technical Rehearsals prior to opening, costumes are added to the production at a **Dress Rehearsal**. Dress Rehearsals allow the actors to practice with their costumes, learn their quick changes, and troubleshoot any issues before an audience is present. A **Wardrobe Supervisor** and a crew of **Dressers** assist the actors backstage. Dress rehearsals also allow the director and other designers to see the costumes under the lights and against the scenery. Designers take notes during the rehearsals and may make small changes based on what they observe.

Conclusion

Costumes add a unique element of spectacle to every theatre production, but their success is measured not by how pretty they are but by how effectively they help the audience to understand the characters in the play. A full team of creative artists help the Costume Designer to realize their artistic vision on the stage. Costumes must work with scenery and lights to ensure that the entire production design feels unified and supports the story being told.

Ecologically Sound Costume Practices. by Barbara Kahl

KEY WORDS

Costume
Costume Designer
Costume Technician
Dress Rehearsal
Heightened Realism
Upcycle

11 The Lighting and Sound Teams

Michael Riha

The role of the lighting designer is simultaneously complex, and quite rudimentary. Simply put, the job of a lighting designer is to "*put light when and where it is needed to support and enhance the story being presented.*" However, it is an art form that demands the specificity and skill of a surgeon and at times, the brute strength of a bodybuilder. It is an incredibly influential and manipulative design element as it relates to live entertainment.

Lighting design is also one of the more recent additions to the ever-growing list of collaborators when it comes to mounting a live theatre production. Scenery and costume design is, without a doubt, the oldest elements that were "designed" when it came to live theatre. Aside from using candlelight and gas lighting fixtures, the primary role lighting played was simply to illuminate the actors so the audience could see what was happening on stage. It wasn't until the late 19th Century with the introduction of electric light that we began to see the full potential of just how powerful lighting would become in the enhancement of storytelling on the stage.

A Conversation with Shawn Irish

In this chapter, I will outline both the technical and artistic skills one needs to develop when training to become a skilled lighting designer. I will also be including quotes from professional lighting designer and colleague, Shawn Irish to help put it all into context.

What you will not find in this chapter is an extensive history of how lighting design has evolved over the years or an in-depth examination of the equipment available to a lighting designer. However, I will allude to how electric light changed the concept of how lighting design could play a role in a more "realistic" way to enhance live theatre. It is my opinion that realism is better suited for film or television and live theatre is home to an advanced sense of imagination and theatricality.

I hope that by the end of this chapter, you better understand what it takes both practically as well as artistically, to become a professional lighting designer. As Robert Edmond Jones said many years ago, it is important to become a "jack of all trades" when pursuing a career path such as that of a theatre designer.

Theatre Architecture and Equipment

Fundamentally speaking, stage lighting is any source that emits light. This can come from any electric lighting fixture that is equipped with either LED or incandescent lamps. It can also come from any natural light source as well, such as a candle, the sun, or a torch. I will focus my examples on electrified sources that are readily available in most theatres you may encounter as a lighting designer. However, the type of equipment used by a lighting designer is one piece of the puzzle that faces any lighting designer as they begin the journey of developing their skills as a theatre artist.

Fun Home, produced by TheatreSquared. Light Design by Shawn Irish in 2017.

Once the type of lighting equipment is determined, there are a number of factors that influence how those fixtures will be used to light the stage. Let's start with the most obvious and perhaps, most influential: the architecture (or

lack thereof) of the **space**. The type of theatre you are working in will play a large role in how you approach your design. Is the space a proscenium theatre? Is it a thrust theatre? Is it in the round? Is it a storefront "theatre?" Is it an outdoor venue? Each of the previously stated spaces brings unique challenges that impact all designers working in the theatre, but it is safe to say, lighting designers must consider as many practical concerns, as well as artistic concerns when designing for a variety of architectural spaces.

Interview

A second factor in executing a lighting design for a live theatrical event is to assess the available equipment and the positions from which the lighting fixtures will hang within the theatre space. As we will discover later in this chapter, a healthy inventory of a wide range of instruments will make the job of a lighting designer that much easier when it comes to selecting the proper instrument that fits both the throw distance and beam angle (diameter of light emitted from the instrument) relative to the distance the lighting positions are from the stage and the desired outcome of the fixture. The throw distance from the lighting position to the stage coupled with the angle from which the fixtures are hung are critical calculations every lighting designer must understand when selecting equipment to light a theatrical production. If the angle is too shallow, the stage can become washed out and flatten the actor and or scenery. If the angle is too extreme (anything greater than a 45-degree

angle) the shadows created by the actor's facial features may make for a ghoulish appearance. Additionally, the longer the throw distance, the narrower the beam of the instrument must be to maximize the efficiency and brightness of the lighting instrument.

Interview

And finally, the type of lighting control (**light board** and dimming capacity) is also an important factor a lighting designer must consider when designing for the theatre. Is the system a sophisticated computer-based light board with endless flexibility that demands a highly skilled programmer and operator, or is it a simple analog board that has fewer "bells and whistles" and is manually controlled? Although the latter is not as common these days, you may find yourself in a situation where simplicity will be your only option and must be embraced to execute a design.

The Light Plot and Paperwork

Another way a lighting designer's choices influence the way an audience responds to the stories being told on stage is the way in which the lighting fixtures are arranged. This is called the **Light Plot**. The light plot is a graphic "map" that is drafted in scale to inform the electricians who hang the instruments, exactly where they are located in the theatre. This is a very specific and accurate way the designer can communicate her intentions for where all fixtures are located. The light plot communicates to the electricians not only the placement of the instrument within the theatre architecture but also specifies the type of instrument, the focus area, the color, the texture, and the channel from which the instrument is controlled.

Interview

[redacted]

Another important factor that must be considered is to understand what financial resources are available for the organization to contribute to the event regarding both equipment and support labor. I put this last because I don't believe great design demands ostentatious financial support. Does the addition

of a larger budget help a designer once she has begun to master the skill of lighting design? Absolutely. However, artistry lies within the imagination of the designer, and equipment can only enhance that artistry. If there is no imagination, no amount of money can make up for a lack of creativity, sensitivity, and skill. Simply put, money does not equal art.

Shakespeare in Love, produced by TheatreSquared. Light Design: Shawn Irish in 2019.

Interview

I have seen productions that utilized a simple, 2-scene preset light board, 12 par cans, and only white light that brought me to tears. I've also seen Broadway productions with an obscene number of lighting fixtures, the latest in moving light technology, state-of-the-art **LED fixtures**, color, texture, and a multitude of cues, only to confuse and distract me from the story I was trying to watch. A common misconception made by many inexperienced, as well as the most seasoned, lighting designers, is the belief that "more gear will make me a better designer." A belief that is disproven many times over by skilled designers.

Interview

The Art of Lighting Design

Now that we've been introduced to the "nuts and bolts" of what a lighting designer needs to know, let's dive into understanding the role that lighting designers play relative to the rest of the design team members. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a lighting designer's job is to "*put light where it is needed and take it away from where it is not needed.*" That may sound oversimplified or even flippant, but in essence, that is the role of the lighting designer. The job is to light the actor, and in some cases the scenery, in the most appropriate way that enhances the themes, actions, and dramatic arc of a particular piece of theatre. This can be achieved in a myriad of ways utilizing many design elements: color, texture, intensity, shape, and movement, to name a few. The ability to appropriately incorporate a combination of design elements to shape a scene is the foundational skill a lighting designer must develop on her way to becoming a true artist of the theatre. Ultimately, a lighting design becomes another character in relation to the script. Light is a living entity on the stage as it moves and changes color, shape, texture, and tempo. These traits become the visual vocabulary of the play to help both the actors as well as the audience members "track" or follow the storyline in a way that enhances the actors while they convey the storyline.

Hamlet, produced by TheatreSquared. Light Design: Shawn Irish in 2014.

Lighting Design and Style

Style also comes into play when deciding how to light a show. Is the play "realistic" where the lighting designer is called upon to imitate or approximate sunlight or moonlight, or to mimic a chandelier that illuminates a ballroom? This form of lighting design requires the designer to research what each of those moments may look like and do her best job to reproduce that quality of light on the stage. Since we cannot rely on sunlight or moonlight or even a chandelier to light a scene inside a theatre, the lighting designer relies on her knowledge of equipment, theatre architecture, available hanging positions, and intensity of stage fixtures to reproduce the "feeling" of sunlight, moonlight, or a chandelier. It is and will always be an "approximation" of those types of light, which is why it is imperative that a lighting designer always search her imagination for how she "feels" in the presence of a particular kind of light she

is trying to reproduce. Becoming an observer of the world is an incredibly important skill all designers must perfect; they need to know how to tap into those emotions when faced with an opportunity to light a scene for a play. This is where the development of one's imagination is so critical to becoming a skilled theatre artist.

When a designer is presented with an opportunity to light a play that is outside of the world of a realistic or naturalistic environment, this is where she is allowed to further develop her skills as a poet of the stage. Selectivity, sensitivity, and specificity become critically important when a lighting designer is working on any play or musical that is not based on realism. This is when lighting designers can focus their attention on creating "atmosphere" as the primary element of their work, rather than working to reproduce a "real" light source. Light can come from anywhere, any direction, any color, any texture, and can be expressed with any intensity when realism is abandoned. Lighting becomes an expression rather than a reproduction.

Interview

With this freedom comes the great responsibility of being sensitive to the power all the above-mentioned design elements contain. Human beings are conditioned to respond to colors, textures, and angles based on their lived

experiences. Take, for example, that many of us consider flashing red lights to indicate danger and that pink is often associated with love. These are powerful triggers that tap into many people's emotions. Intense, white light can also conjure up strong emotions simply based on the context in which it is presented. An audience sees an actor sitting in a chair alone on a stage that is being lit by a single, bright, tightly focused white light shining directly over the actor. This powerful image conjures images of a police interrogation room. Stage the same scene using the same chair and actor but now light it with only a candlelight being held by the actor, and the emotional response by the audience will be quite different. This is the power of light.

Another important aspect of lighting design is the use of the absence of light. The brightness of a light is relative to its surroundings and the darkness around the light. Simply put, shadows are part of light. The ability to cast shadows onto surfaces is another powerful tool used by the lighting designer to direct an audience member where to look on a stage. Imagine a scene where two characters are discussing another character and unbeknownst to them, a shadow of a figure appears on stage that is clearly visible to the audience. The storytelling is now changed by the presence of a shadow of a figure. Which character cast the shadow? Did the person who cast the shadow hear everything that was being discussed by the actors who thought they were alone?

Lighting as Scenery or Costume

This is an appropriate segue into the idea that lighting, aside from being additive in the sense that light is projected onto scenery and actors to reveal them, create the time of day, and set the mood, can also be additive in the sense of it becoming either a scenic element or used to create or alter a "costume." What I mean by this is that light and its shape, intensity, color, direction, and texture, can become so influential that its mere presence can take on the characteristics of a new location and or shift the meaning of a character simply by altering the character's costume color and/or texture. For example, if a scene calls for a character to be seen in a jail cell, a tightly focused rectangle of light with shadows that represent the bars of a jail cell can be

introduced to create that "jail cell" without the addition of any physical elements. When the light cue appears, the audience and actors are transported into a jail cell. Also, if an actor is wearing a beautiful blue suit that expresses a sense of leadership and strength, but in a scene later in the play the same suit is lit in a dark amber color with texture added to make the suit appear more tattered or wrinkled, the actor is now able to portray an altered state of the once strong character.

The Artifice of Lighting Design

We all know that what we are seeing on stage is not "real." We are in a building, watching artists recreate a story for us. What we do understand is that theatre allows the audience members an opportunity to escape the day-to-day stresses and struggles that make up their "real life," even if it is only for a couple of hours. The level at which an audience member can fully engage or immerse themselves in that world is contingent upon the work of the design team and the performers. The success or failure of being able to create a world that an audience member can fully engage themselves in is contingent on the level of talent and commitment of the aforementioned group AND the level of distractions within the environment where the play is performed. A noisy patron opening a candy wrapper, someone's phone ringing, a sudden coughing fit, a person fidgeting in a seat, these are all ways an audience member can be taken out of "the moment" and is reminded that yes, "I am sitting in a theatre watching actors pretending to be someone else." However, those distractions are not limited to audience members' bad behaviors only.

Ride the Cyclone, produced by the Theatre Department at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Light Design: Shawn Irish. 2022.

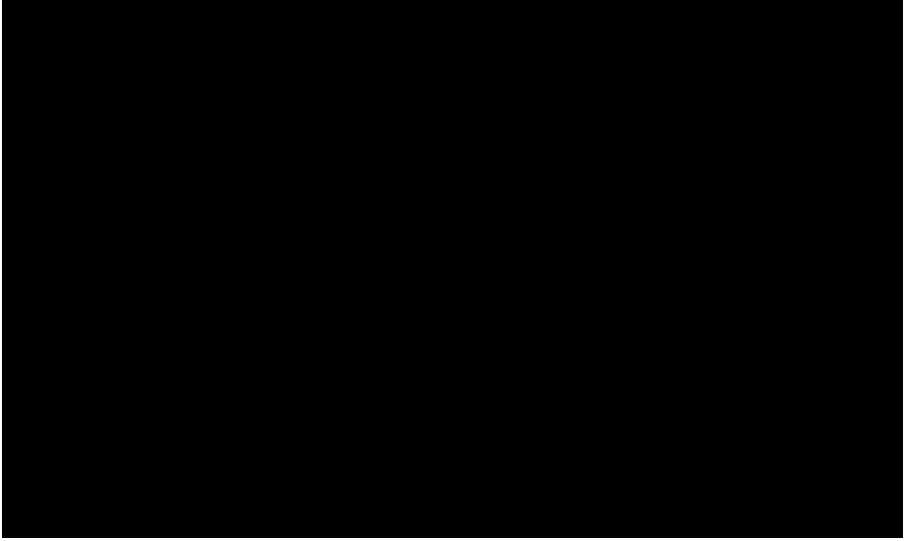
Distractions can also come in the form of stylistic design choices. Scenery can be intentionally suggestive in its execution rather than realistic in its representation of a particular environment. Costumes can be exaggerated versions of real clothing to enhance a particular character or stylistic choice, and unless the entire design team is utilizing a similar visual vocabulary, an audience member may find themselves confused as they watch a production

unfold. Lighting can also serve to remind the audience that they are clearly sitting in a theatre auditorium watching a play. This can be achieved by how the lighting fixtures that are being used in a production are masked, or hidden from the audience's view, or if the design team chooses to reveal the theatrical instruments to the audience. By revealing them, the designer is indicating that what the audience is witness to, is not real. It is an artifice or interpretation of reality through the lens of theatricality.

When a lighting designer chooses to use traditional stage drapery or other architectural and/or scenic elements to "hide" the physical lighting fixture, a conscious choice is being made to allow the illumination of the scene to appear to be as "realistic" as possible or to help the audience members focus on the fact that the use of artificial (theatrical) fixtures are not being utilized. In order to illustrate this concept, I will use two examples. In the first, it may be the goal of the lighting designer to help illuminate a scene where a table lamp is the only light needed to provide the necessary illumination for a particular scene. It is safe to assume that a typical 60-watt light bulb from a modest table lamp will be hard-pressed to light an entire stage. Especially if the audience chamber is large. For a realistic scene such as this, a lighting designer will typically add additional Key (primary) and Fill (secondary) light using theatrical fixtures to enhance the single light source seen by the audience on stage. However, if the lighting designer chooses to mask, or hide, the instruments that provide additional key (primary) and fill (secondary) fixtures to enhance or provide additional illumination for the motivational source – the 60-watt light bulb – an intentional decision is being made to try and "trick" the audience to believe the single source that is visible on stage is creating all of the light on the stage. This technique allows the audience members an opportunity to fully focus their attention on the actors in an immersive, real way.

Big Love, produced by the Theatre Department at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Light Design: Shawn Irish. 2014.

Interview



If the lighting designer chooses to reveal the theatrical lighting fixtures to the audience, there is an acknowledgment by the designer that she is OK with the fact that the audience sees the artifice of the event. Revealing the theatrical fixtures is a signal to the audience that, "Yes. We know we are all sitting in a theatre together watching an event unfold before our eyes. We are not trying to 'suspend your disbelief' and trick you, the audience, into believing that what you are watching is in any way a real event."

The Use of Spectacles in Light

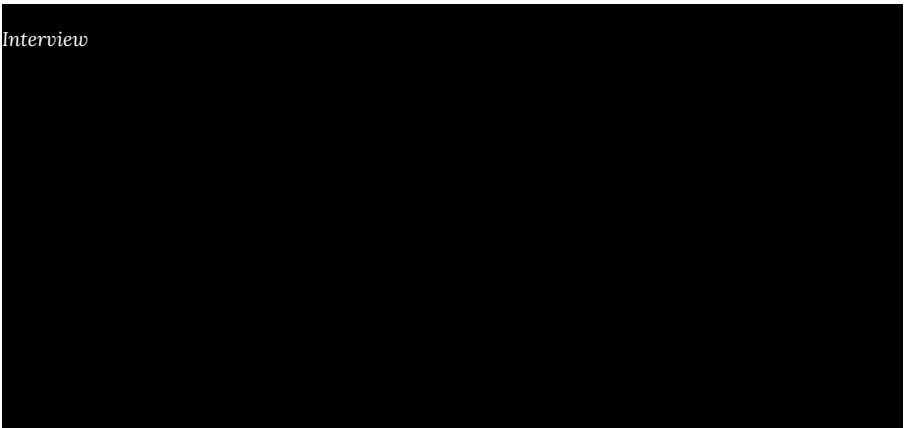
In addition to illuminating the actors and scenery, the lighting designer is also responsible for making sure the stage picture is beautifully lit while lighting the actors. Depending on the architecture of the theatre, a lighting designer will create a lighting design that takes into consideration all that the audience sees. If the show is being presented in a proscenium theatre, it is important that the entire stage picture is composed and there are no distractions created by either an area that is too bright or a scene that is too dim. Unlike a motion picture where a director and cinematographer can zoom a camera into an actor's face to capture the raw emotion of a scene in a highly controlled manner, only the lighting designer can provide that form of focus by isolating a scene with intensity, color, texture, or shape, to bring focus and attention to a particular moment in a play.

Interview

Spring Awakening, produced by the Theatre Department at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Light Design: Shawn Irish. 2014.

Light also plays a fascinating role in how well an audience hears the actor. Often, a lighting designer will choose to light a scene with a lower intensity to encourage the audience members to focus more intently on what the actors are saying to one another, or directly to the audience in some instances. Low levels of light also illicit stronger feelings of suspense and mystery as well. Conversely, brightly lit scenes are found to elicit stronger feelings of happiness and humor.

Interview



Developing Technical Skills

In addition to developing as a sensitive and thoughtful designer, a lighting designer must also be competent in a wide variety of technical skills. In addition to being able to accurately draft a lighting plot, the designer must be trained in play script analysis, collaboration, equipment knowledge, color theory, and basic electricity principles. These are just a few of the critically important tools a designer must obtain and maintain throughout her career in order to work as a freelance lighting designer. The skills mentioned above represent a wide range of what is ostensibly nothing more than communication skills. Skills that are both artistically and technically based are equally important to developing and maintaining a long, successful career as a working theatre artist.

Interview

Who does what?

- The **Lighting Designe**r designs the lights for a production.
- The **Master Electrical** and the **Electricians** hang and focus the instruments.
- The **Light Board Operator** records and operates the Light cues on the Light Board.

The Sound Designer

by Kiara Pipino

We can all agree that sounds and music make a huge difference in the way we perceive and experience something, so it should come as no surprise how much sound influences the audience's reception of a theatre production.

Sound Design is a relatively new field in theatre although its contribution can really make a difference in the success of a show. Ultimately, the sound designer is responsible for everything that the audience hears coming from the stage.

The advent of microphones and recording devices has made a significant difference and actually is what led to the definition of a professional in the field. The first sound designer to be credited as such is the American artist Dan Dugan, who worked at the American Conservatory Theatre, in the 1968/1969 theatrical season.

The Process

Similarly to all other creatives, the Sound Designer's first task is to read the play several times looking for what is needed in terms of sounds. The next step

would be to compile a list of sound cues and research them. Similarly to costumes and sets, sounds need to be consistent with the style of the production. Sounds in fact can be incredibly telling of the timeframe of a play. Most ordinary, everyday sounds have changed hugely in time! A doorbell in the 18th Century sounded very different from our current one! The same can be said for phone ringtones, announcements, radio advertisements, train sounds, car sounds….and so much more.

The Sound Designer's job is therefore to make sure that the sounds are accurate and consistent with the overall design and concept of the production.

There are **databases** of sounds – all recorded sounds are called **canned sounds** – that can be accessed and that provide a wide variety of sounds belonging to several time frames, but if nothing fits what the designer is looking for there might be the need to make a recording of it. Most Sound Designers have a background in music and technical theatre and are usually very skilled at recording new material, including sounds, music, or even announcements. The greatest value of a canned sound is that it will always be the same, while the volume can be adjusted according to the needs of the production.

At times, music is also required in the production, to underscore a scene and provide atmosphere, and music usually plays as the audience enters the theatre and at the end of the production. Selecting the music or composing the specific music that is needed is also a task that the Sound Designer needs to accomplish. Like the other designers, the sound designer needs to discuss the choices with the entire creative team, specifically with the director.

When the designer has completed the list of sounds needed for the production and has shared it with the creative team, it is time for the sounds to be implemented in the production. Hence, the designer hands the **sound cue list** - or **sound plot-** and the recorded sounds to the **Sound Board Operator,** who records them in the **Sound Board** and then launches them during the show.

Microphones

Body Microphones – or Wireless Microphones

One of the most delicate decisions that the Sound Designer needs to make is about the right kind of microphones needed for the production.

Mind you, not all shows require to be amplified. For example, intimate productions staged in Black Box theatres or small venues can usually rely on the actors' ability to project. Actors are trained to support their voice in a way that it can carry more sound, and theatres are also usually designed and built to facilitate the acoustic. Yet, in particular when it comes to musicals or when productions take place in big venues microphones have become necessary.

The most common microphone in use is the wireless body microphone, which is a small device that is given to each actor and is concealed in their hair and secured to their body. Those microphones work on a radio system and rely on batteries, which need to be changed before the show. Each microphone is given a number, and all mics are operated by the Sound Board so that they can be turned on and off according to the needs of the show. Body mics are reliable, although they can malfunction and generate odd sounds and "background noise." Most notably, the microphones will pick up everything, and that means that they have to be carefully secured and the mic itself needs to be as close as possible to the mouth of the actor.

You can see the wireless mic on the actor's forehead. "Look at that smile!" by The Western Sky is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Panoramic microphones

Panoramic mics are more complex, wired microphones that are mostly utilized to capture and amplify the stage area rather than a single person. They are particularly used for concerts, where the orchestra is on stage. They can be located downstage, on the apron, if there isn't a lot of movement on stage (otherwise they would pick up the sound of the steps!). Otherwise, they can be hung above the stage.

A directional microphone. Photo by Kiara Pipino.

Hand Held microphones

Hand-held microphones are the ones that are most loved by singers, as they provide the greatest support to the voice with little alteration to the overall sound. They are rarely used in theatre productions though, as they would break the illusion of realism in the storytelling.

The Foley Table

KEW WORDS

Brightness

Canned Sound

Electricians

Foley Table/Jack Donovan Foley

Focus

Led Fixtures

Light Board

Light Board Operator

Light Plot

Master Electrician

Microphones

Realism

Sound Board

Sound Board Operator

Sound Plot

Sound Databases

Spaces

III

The Culture of Theatre

Image of a Puppet Theatre in Palermo, Italy. Photo by Kiara Pipino

12 Theatre History, in Brief!

Barbara N. Kahl

Theatre is loosely defined as an intentional performance by one person in front of an audience. The beginnings of theatre are unknown. There are several theories, including **the Ritualist theory**, suggesting theatre began with religious rituals which became codified and performative. **The Great Man theory** offers that one person's genius can be attributed to the origin of the art form. **The Storytelling theory** posits that theatre evolved as a way to enhance storytelling through impersonation. There is no evidence to prove any of these, or several other theories, as the true and correct origin point for theatre; however, the Ritualist theory is the most often accepted, although some questionable research methods were employed.

The Ancient Greeks

The Greek philosopher, **Aristotle**, (384 BCE – 322 BCE) stated that ***mimesis*** (imitation), is inherent in all humans, and both he and **Plato** refer to it as the "re-presentation of nature."

Early Greek theatre developed through song and poetry and grew into the well-known forms of tragedy and comedy we now associate with it. Dithyrambs, passionate hymns sung and danced to honor Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility, were performed by a chorus of men and boys as part of Dionysian festivals. The **City Dionysia,** or Great Dionysia, was held in Athens in the Spring. The festival had dramatic competitions in which three tragic poets would write, produce, and perform in three tragedies, as well as a satyr play (a vulgar comedy mocking some heroic subject). Later, when comedy was added, five comic poets would each enter one play. The judges would be picked by lottery, and the winning poet awarded a prize.

Dithyrambs were the basis for tragedy, but how did the switch from dithyrambic verse to tragedy occur? This is where the Great Man origin theory

makes sense. According to legend, Thespis, a tragic poet, was the first person to step out of the dithyrambic chorus of fifty men and add character speeches and dialogue between the actor (protagonist) and the leader of the chorus (*choragus*) during a performance. This synthesis of existing dramatic elements and the addition of characterization became the birth of tragedy.

Aristotle broke tragedy down into six parts: Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Song. "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions."

There were many tragic poets (playwrights) who presented works at the Dionysian festivals over the years. Unfortunately, for any number of reasons, very few of their plays remain. The three best-known ancient Greek tragedians are Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

Aeschylus (525 BCE – 456 BCE) was a poet who may have written between eight to ninety plays, of which we only have seven complete texts and several fragments. Aeschylus is credited with diminishing the size of the chorus from fifty to twelve men and adding a second actor (*deuteragonist*). His best-known work is the dramatic trilogy, the *Oresteia*, which portrays the story of the House of Atreus. The trilogy is composed of *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*. The only complete trilogy of Greek drama to survive, the *Oresteia* was first performed in 458 BCE.

Sophocles (496 BCE – 406 BCE) was the younger contemporary of Aeschylus. He wrote prolifically, possibly as few as ninety or as many as one hundred and twenty-three plays, of which seven remain. He is said to have competed in the City Dionysia approximately thirty times and won twenty-four times. His best-known plays are *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*. Aside from the sheer volume of work he produced, Sophocles is known for his dramatic innovations. He changed the number of chorus members from twelve to fifteen and added the third actor (***tritagonist***). This allowed for more characters onstage, as well as more complex plots and interactions.

The third of the great tragedians was **Euripedes** (485 BCE – 406 BCE). His works differed from his predecessors by focusing on the more human aspects

of heroes, as well as their fallibility. His characters also included strong female protagonists, as seen in *Medea* and *Trojan Women.* Euripedes also diminished the importance of the chorus. In *Medea*, which is practically a domestic drama, focusing on an individual character's personal tragedy, the chorus is more of a hindrance to the story than a help.

As these playwrights developed tragedy, **Aristophanes** (448 BCE – 388 BCE) blended comic elements from folk traditions, as well as politics of the day to create Greek comedy. Plays written before 400 BCE are called Old Comedy, and Aristophanes' plays fall into this category. There were many Old Comedy playwrights, but only eleven texts survive, all of them by Aristophanes. His plays focused on satirical social and political commentary. In *Lysistrata*, his most popular comedy, the women of Athens go on a sex strike to end a war.

Between approximately 350 BCE through 250 BCE was the period when New Comedy was preferred. **Menander** (342 BCE – 292 BCE) wrote in this new style and although we have no complete plays of his, there are enough fragments to note its difference from the Old Comedy. Menander's plays deal with situations of urban life rather than political satire. The plays are more like a comedy of manners than the religious plays of theatre's origins. The smart and cunning slave has a main role in Menander's writing.

Greek drama was performed in outdoor theatres built into the hillside. The Theatre of Dionysus had a slope called the ***theatron*** (seeing place) and the flat area below was the ***orchestra*** (dancing place). There was an altar to Dionysus set in the middle of the orchestra. Later, a permanent structure was built that included stone seating in a semi-circle, a circular *orchestra*, and a *skene* (hut or tent used for changes, as well as entrances and exits) set behind the *orchestra*, opposite the *theatron*. The ***skene*** was originally a temporary wooden structure, but by the fourth century BCE, it became a permanent stone structure with three doors, which allowed for entrances and exits, as well as the ability to hear violent acts happening out of the audience's sight. The ***paraskene*** was a rectangular area just in front of the *skene* and was the primary acting area. Greek theatres also had ***paradoi*** (passages) to the side of the *paraskene* leading offstage. The audience used these to enter the theatre, and they were also used by the chorus and characters such as messengers. The rendering below shows a modern design for a Greek theatre, utilizing the elements from theatres of antiquity.

Hearst Greek Theatre: An original sketch by John Galen Howard (1864–1931)

All actors in Greek theatre were male and were probably not paid for their participation in the festivals. Their costumes consisted of typical clothing such as *chitons* (tunics) and *himations* (cloaks), as well as **masks** with wigs attached. These had wide mouth orifices, which aided in the projection of the voice, and were made of lightweight wood, cork, or linen, with exaggerated facial expressions. By changing their mask, actors were able to portray different characters and genders. Due to the fragility of the materials, we no longer have actual masks, but know what they look like thanks to representations found in ancient artwork. The costumes included a form of platform boots called ***cothurni***. These aid in making the characters larger than life, which was useful when portraying heroic characters. It had the practical function of making the actor taller and easier to see.

Terracotta comedy mask sculpture, 200-250 CE Wikimedia Commons, photo by Jeronimo Roure Perez

Greek comic actors were less stately and heroic in appearance, wearing short tunics, often heavily padded, and *socci* (soft shoes not unlike ballet shoes) which allowed for ease of movement to accommodate acrobatics. Many of Aristophanes' characters also wore a dangling phallus as part of their costume.

Roman Theatre

As Rome expanded its Empire into Greece, it would have encountered New Comedy. The Romans were excellent at assimilating the best and most useful ideas and items in the countries they controlled through the Empire. The theatrical traditions of the Greeks were easy to adapt to Roman societal standards. Comedy was the most popular dramatic form, and in the mid-third century, the Romans brought writer, Livius Andronicus, to Rome to alter a few elements of Greek comedies to suit Roman tastes. As a result, this gave rise to the two major playwrights of ***fabula palliata*** (Roman comedy), **Plautus** (254 BCE – 184 BCE) and **Terence** (195 BCE – 159 BCE).

Plautus reworked original Greek comedies to suit Roman fashions. Full of stock characters, unlikely mistakes, and over-the-top humor, they became the basis for *Commedia Dell'arte*, and Shakespeare used *The Menaechmi* by Plautus as the foundation for *Comedy of Errors*. His work did not use a chorus, nor did it deal with political issues. It was farcical and fun, dealing with romantic foibles and missteps.

Terence, a freed slave from Libya, was well educated due to a generous patron. His plays were also based on Greek comedies, as were most Roman plays of the time, but he would often combine two plots from different plays and create an entirely fresh work. He had a more refined, literary style.

Roman theatre, like the Greek model, began as a "festival theatre," honoring the gods with theatrical performances, vying for audience attention along with the other entertainments offered such as rope walking and gladiatorial combat. The theatre structures were temporary wooden constructions until 55 BCE when permanent stone edifices were built. Like the theatres in Greece, Roman theatres had an orchestra (semi-circular) and a deep, wide stage area behind the orchestra. The permanent facade behind the stage (***scaenaefrons***) had three doors in the center, and one at each end. There were often second-story windows where action would also take place. These theatres were designed to seat large audiences. The largest theatre in Rome held over 40,000 spectators. For comparison, CitiField seats 41,922, and Yankee Stadium seats 54, 251.

The Roman tragedy was not very popular. There were ***fabula crepidata*** (adaptations of Greek tragedies) and ***fabula praetexta*** (plays with Roman stories). Seneca is the most well-known Roman tragic playwright. The only surviving examples of Roman tragedy are nine plays by Seneca. There is debate about whether they were ever produced in his lifetime, or written as **closet dramas**: plays intended for private readings rather than public performances. Either way, his work created the foundation on which Renaissance writers, including Shakespeare, structured their plays. Seneca's influence includes: breaking the play into five parts separated by choral odes, creating the basis for the five-act tragedy; protagonists driven by overwhelming emotion which leads to their downfall, rather than having a tragic flaw; the use of supernatural characters like witches and ghosts; a focus on pithy language, asides, and soliloquies; and the use of violence onstage, rather than describing an offstage violent action as occurred in Greek tragedy.

Throughout much of the Roman era, theatre competed with Roman spectacle for audiences. Gladiatorial contests (*munera*), chariot racing, and mock sea battles (*naumachiae*) overshadowed dramatic forms. By the end of the Roman era, new plays were no longer being written for public performance.

Two important texts touching theatre were written at this time. *Ars Poetica*, by the poet Horace, acted as a guidebook for playwrights. In it, he discusses the importance of keeping comedy and tragedy separate. He dictated that plays should have a unity of time and place in order to achieve a unity of action. He stressed that Unity and verisimilitude were important to achieve believability. "Poets, if they are to be successful, should provide both pleasure and instruction (333–34), and what they write must be more than simply believable, it must be as close as possible to reality: *ficta voluptatis causa sint proxima veris* (338)." The other text, which heavily influenced the building of theatres in the Renaissance, was *De Architectura*, by Vitruvius. The ten-volume work covers how to build cities, but also theatres and scenery.

Medieval Theatre

During the collapse of the Roman Empire, Christian objections to immorality in pantomimes and plays discouraged public performances. Without the cultural influence of Rome, the social world of Western Europe splintered into feudal manors and warlords. The rule of law collapsed and theatre, or at least coherent public movements in theatre, stalled. Written records of classical plays survived only as literature in Europe. Actors, dancers, acrobats, and musicians continued to live as itinerant performers, but few records exist of their work.

The Catholic Church kept theatre alive through the institution of *liturgical drama* around 900 CE. The church introduces dramatic performances to Easter services, acting out the story of the Resurrection. Ironically, the institution that discouraged theater during the collapse of Rome became responsible for its rebirth in the West.

{{PD-1996}}MS 19352, ff 189v-191 Twelve syllable verses in the form of a liturgical drama, in dialogue, based on Psalm 151. Date: 1066

Near the end of the 10th Century, **Hroswitha** (c. 935 – c.975), a canoness of a nunnery in Gandersheim (Germany), wrote six plays celebrating holy maidens overcoming fleshly temptations. She was a great admirer of the writing style of the playwright Terence but thought his subject matter was not appropriate for Christian readers. At this same time, Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, England, issued the *Regularis Concordia*, a guidebook with instructions for the use of liturgical drama in the Easter celebration.

Early liturgical dramas included simple settings, costumes, and properties, and were performed in churches. The ***platea*** (main playing space) was the nave of a church, with more specific locations called ***mansions*** placed along the sides. A mansion represented settings for liturgical plays, including Jerusalem, Paradise, and Hell. The audience moved along with the action. These performances relied on singing or chanting to communicate the stories of the plays. The performers were members of the clergy.

The medieval liturgical drama developed directly from the Christian liturgy, focusing on Easter celebrations and the Resurrection. After some time, this led to the Mystery plays in England, *autos sacramentales* in Spain, and numerous other liturgical plays across Europe, some of which are still performed today.

After 1200, new forms of religious drama began to appear, independent of the liturgy. Outdoor plays, or pageants, were staged in the towns and used the local languages rather than Latin. The performers moved from being clergy members to laymen. By 1350, the Feast of Corpus Christi became a focal point in the spring and summer months for the performance of plays. Religious themes were preserved and expanded to include events from the life of Christ, saints, or stories from the Old Testament. **Mystery cycles** emerged as episodic plays presenting Biblical history from Creation to Doomsday, in the form of drama. **Morality plays**, including *Everyman*, evolved as allegorical lessons of Church doctrine.

As these plays moved outside, they were increasingly produced by religious organizations in the towns along with the trade guilds. The staging required temporary and mobile stages called pageant carts. These were large wagons on which a scenic setting was designed. A new profession was created for these

performances— the **Master of Secrets**. This was the early special effects master who would create fire, flying, or trapdoor effects to increase the theatricality and spectacle of medieval dramas.

When religious dramas moved outdoors, the secular drama also experienced a rebirth, starting with masques performed for the members of the nobility, and mummers' plays. "'**Mummers' plays**' are traditional dramatic entertainment, still performed in a few villages in England and Northern Ireland, in which a champion is killed in a fight and is then brought to life by a doctor. It is thought likely that the play has links with primitive ceremonies held to mark important stages in the agricultural year."

By the late 15th Century, a class of professional playwrights and actors had emerged under the patronage of wealthy members of society. Theatre patronage soon became an aristocratic badge of prestige. With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, many scholars fled west to Italy, bringing with them vestiges of classical artistry and writing salvaged from the libraries of the Eastern Empire.

The Renaissance and the Beginning of Professional Theatre

The 15th Century saw the rise of Humanism, the fundamental impulse driving the Renaissance. The severity of medieval social hierarchies and the focus on the divine gave way to a philosophy of tolerance, and admiration for human qualities and accomplishments. With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, classical texts became available due to the "rediscovery" of the ancient manuscripts as they came back to Western Europe. The work of Vitruvius was interpreted by Renaissance architects and theatres like Andrea Palladio's **Teatro Olimpico** in Vincenza, and Aleotti's **Teatro Farnese** in Parma were created to imitate Roman theatre forms.

Although the birthplace of the Renaissance, the focus was more on architecture and fine art at this time and less on plays. However, it cannot be

denied that Italianate scenic developments pushed the design world forward. Serlio's single-point perspective settings, the development of the proscenium arch, wing and drop scenery, and the raked stage (higher in the back than the front, thus our Upstage and Downstage), cemented Italy's place in the development of modern theatre.

Italy may not have fostered great playwrights at this point in time, but one cannot overlook the development of ***commedia dell'arte***. This actor-driven theatre, with improvisation based on a set of stock characters and a loose plot line to give the story some structure, flourished at this time and has continued to this day. Using trained actors, masks, and a predictable plotline, *commedia dell'arte* would often include suggestions from the audience. The stock characters and broad comic style were popular across Europe, and influenced comedic writing, particularly in France from the 16th to the 18th century. Most of the plotlines revolve around the mischief of servant characters (*zanni*) and the foiling of the vain, pompous, or lecherous. Stock characters include *Capitano* – the braggart soldier, *zanni* – crafty servants (*Arlechino* and *Harlequin* was most popular), *Pantalone* – an old man, often greedy and a fool, and *Dottore* – a doctor, sometimes a drunkard, often just foolish. These characters (and others) have been richly echoed by playwrights such as Shakespeare and Molière.

The Renaissance arrived in England a bit later than in southern Europe. The late Tudor period became the golden age of English theatre, yet elements of medieval theatre overlapped. The Greek and Roman classical texts eventually reached England and influenced many of the playwrights there. *Ralph Roister Doister* by Nicholas Udall owes a great deal to Plautus and his *Braggart Soldier*. Elements of that same play can be felt in Shakespeare's character Falstaff, just as the influence of Seneca may be seen in *Hamlet* with the violent fights, ghosts, and soliloquies.

Just who wrote the plays required to sustain a Golden Age of Theatre? You are probably familiar with William Shakespeare, playwright, actor, and part owner of the Globe Theatre, but there were many others writing at this time as well. The University Wits were an informal group of scholars (all were university educated, or had studied law at the Inns of Court) who applied classical standards to the needs of a strong contemporary stage. They were: Robert Green (1558-1592); Thomas Kyd (1558-1594), who wrote *The Spanish Tragedy*, c.

1587, which was one of the most popular plays of the 16th Century; John Lyly (c. 1554-1606) known for prose comedies; and Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), the contemporary of William Shakespeare, famous for his prose style and subject matter, known for *The Jew of Malta*, *Dr. Faustus*, and *Edward II*. His fame might have rivaled that of Shakespeare had he not died in a fight at the age of 29.

Acting did not fall into the easy format of the medieval guild, so Elizabethan acting troupes required patrons, or they could be arrested as vagrants and vagabonds. Noble patronage meant protection and was a level of respectability, yet it included restrictions. All professional acting troupes had to be licensed and each play had to be approved before it was performed. The Master of the Revels awarded the licenses to perform in London and kept a daily account of approved plays, as may be seen in the accounts of Edmund Tylney, Master of the Revels in 1604, shown below.

James Burbage was the head of the first important troupe, the Earl of Leicester's Men, licensed in 1574. Later important troupes were The Chamberlain's Men which included Richard Burbage and William Shakespeare, The Lord Admiral's Men, Christopher Marlowe's troupe, and The Queen's Men. As in classical theatre, all members of Elizabethan acting troupes were male, with boys playing the female roles. In 1576, **The Theatre**, the first commercial public theatre, opened in Shoreditch, outside of the City of London. Built by James Burbage, very little is known about the actual theatre, but after it proved a successful venture, other theatres were rapidly built.

Most of what we know about Elizabethan theatres comes from a few illustrations, (most made at a later date) some descriptions from builders' records, a few legal documents, and recently, excavations of The Rose, and a few others. There were outdoor theatres, theatres with covered seating and open yards for "groundlings" (audience members who paid a small price and stood to watch the performance), and private houses (indoor theatres for a select audience). There may have been no "one size fits all" theatre during the reign of Elizabeth I.

"*Account of Edmund Tylney Master of the Revels for* 1604-1605"

Meanwhile, in Spain, a parallel development arc occurred. Religious dramas,

called ***autos sacramentales*** were performed, representing the mysteries of Communion and the Eucharist. These had a strong similarity to the Mystery Cycles and Morality plays of England. Allegorical characters of Sin, Faith, Death, etc., were intended to guide audience members to be better members of society. These were produced by trade guilds, but they were still religious. The productions took place on *carros*, large moveable wagons, similar to pageant carts. These traveled a specific route, making planned stops along the way.

The 15th Century saw the development of popular theatre, with many playwrights and a great prolificacy of plays being produced. ***Comedias Nuevas*** (New Comedy) were secular plays in three acts using history, popular culture, mythology, and Bible stories as source material. The large casts included characters of nobles, ladies, and comical servants. Performances took place in *corrales*, public, open-air courtyards or patios between three houses, with covered seating along the edge of the courtyard. Women would often watch from the windows of the houses. The structure of the *corrales* was similar to the seating at some Elizabethan playhouses. One major difference in the Spanish and English styles, however, was the inclusion of women in the cast. There were restrictions that varied over time but included that there be no cross-dressing and that the women be wives or daughters of company members.

There were many popular playwrights at this time in Spain, but the main three were Miguel de Cervantes, Lopes de Vega, and Pedro Calderon de la Barca. **Miguel de Cervantes** (1547 – 1616), may be best known to the English-speaking world for his novel, *Don Quixote*, but he was one of Spain's early successful playwrights. He penned thirty *comedias*, but only two of his plays survive; *The Traffic of Algiers* and *The Siege of Numantia*. **Lope de Vega** (1562 – 1635), was a pioneer of the Golden Age of Spanish theatre. He is credited with fixing the structure and the themes for Spanish *comedia*. A prolific writer, he created five hundred plays, nine epic poems, four novellas, three novels, and three thousand sonnets. Still popular is his play, *Fuente Ovejuna* (The Sheep Well). **Pedro Calderon de la Barca** lived a varied life, having been a soldier and a priest as well as a playwright. His one hundred and twenty *comedias* and eighty *autos sacramentales* were polished and refined works. He is best known for his play *La Vida es Sueno* (Life is a Dream).

French Neoclassical Theatre and the Rise of Romanticism

French theatre in the 17th and 18th Centuries was a polyglot of English, Spanish, and Italian theatrical practices. Neoclassical Italianate theatre design emphasized perspective and visual balance. Large casts and complex plots, as found in English and Spanish theatre, became the norm. There was a decided lack of specificity until the neoclassical ideals of Italian theatre were adopted in France. The tenets of neoclassicism mimic the ideals for theatre laid out by Horace in *Ars Poetica*: purity of genre—tragedy and comedy should not be mixed; verisimilitude—the story should have the appearance of truth and the actions be probable; decorum—a character's behavior should stay in keeping with their sex, social standing, and occupation; structure—the play should have five acts; and purpose—drama should teach as well as please.

In the early 17th Century, French theatre struggled due to political instability in the country. In the 1630s, an educated class of playwrights began to emerge, and at the request of Cardinal Richelieu, in 1636, they established the French Academy, a group limited to forty writers and intellectuals. The Academy was given a royal charter in 1637. **Pierre Corneille** (1606 – 1684) wrote comedies early in his career, but it was his play, *Le Cid*, which brought him to the attention of the French Academy. This tragicomedy was based on the Spanish play, *Las Mocedades del Cid*, and Corneille applied neoclassical ideals to the adaptation, trimming it from six acts to five acts, and condensing the action into a twenty-four-hour period. He was criticized by the French Academy for mixing genres, and for putting too much action into one day, stretching the limits of believability.

After the Academy's ruling on *Le Cid*, strict neoclassicism could be seen in the work of **Jean Racine** (1639 – 1699). Trained in the classics, he updated Aristophanes' comedy, *The Wasps*, into *the Litigants*. He adapted Euripedes' tragedy, *Hippolytus*, into a pure example of neoclassicism, *Phaedre*. Phaedre is the center of the conflict, and the play focuses on her love for Hippolytus. The actions are plausible, the events occur in one place and over a few hours of time, and ultimately, evil is punished.

Molière – Nicolas Mignard (1658) "Moliere" by Stifts- och landsbiblioteket i Skara is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

King Louis XIV was a great patron of the arts, and during his reign (1643 -1715) bestowed Royal patronage on theatre in France. This led to the construction of large public theatres in Paris, as well as the establishment of resident acting troupes, including an Italian *commedia* troupe. All public and court theatres in Paris were built or renovated at this time to have the Italian proscenium arch. Another significant change during this time was the inclusion of women as onstage performers.

What Corneille and Racine did for French tragedy (setting the standard for the next century), Molière did for French comedy. Jean Baptiste Poquelan (1622-1673), aka, **Molière**, was a favorite of Louis XIV. In the 1660s he successfully combined neoclassicism, *commedia dell'arte*, and French farce in plays that ridiculed social and moral pretense. His comedies were purely French and of his own devising, based on his experiences and observations, rather than reworkings of older Italian or Spanish plays. They were fresh and wickedly funny. Plays like *Tartuffe* (1664), *The Misanthrope* (1666), *The Bourgeois Gentleman* (1670), and *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673), have made Molière one of history's most famous and enduring playwrights.

Restoration Theatre in England

After Shakespeare, there was a decline in English theatre. The onset of the First Civil War led to the closure of theatres in 1642 by the Long parliament. King Charles I had lost his head, and Charles II was in exile in France. Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans banned theatre.

In 1660, Charles II returned to the throne and encouraged artists to employ the theatre conventions he saw in France: Italianate staging, the proscenium stage, and elaborate scenery. These innovations were necessary due to the neglect of the old theatre buildings, the out-of-date plays, and tired theatre conventions.

Restoration Theatre also introduced women to the English stage, with pioneering actresses, **Elizabeth Barry** and **Anne Bracegirdle**, leading the way.

Another trailblazer who should not be forgotten is **Mrs. Aphra Behn**. Hroswitha may have been the first female playwright we know of in Western theatre, but Mrs. Aphra Behn was the first woman to make her living as a writer. She wrote poems, pamphlets, plays, and novels. Her early life was spent in Surinam, West Indies. Her first novel, *Oroonoko*, was based on her time there. She moved to England after her father's death, and married Mr. Behn, a Dutch merchant, but was soon widowed. She became a spy for Charles II during the war with the Dutch, but ended up in a debtors' prison, as the King apparently did not pay her. She wrote to support herself, creating twenty plays, (some bawdy and showing scenes in brothels) but she was writing for a commercial audience and needed her words to sell tickets. She was told her writing was scandalous, and replied that it would not be so were she a man. *The Rover*, with its female-driven plot, gives Aphra Behn the moniker of an early feminist.

> All women together, ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn…for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds…Behn proved that money could be made by writing at the sacrifice, perhaps, of certain agreeable qualities; and so by degrees writing became not merely a sign of folly and a distracted mind but was of practical importance.
>
> Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (1929)

The Restoration plays with their French influence focused on aristocratic themes, social intrigue, and the sexual reputation of its characters. Conversely, characters in Comedies of Manners valued wit over morality and reputation over virtue. Prominent playwrights of the time included **William Congreve**

(1670 – 1729), **William Wycherly** (1641 – 1716), and **Oliver Goldsmith** (1728 – 1724). By the late 18th century there were more changes. The satirical edginess of English restoration comedies gave way to sentimentalism, with an emphasis on visual form over substance.

Meanwhile, across the pond in 1665, William Darby's *Ye Bare and Ye Cubb* was the first English language play presented in the colonies. 1730 saw the first play by Shakespeare in the New World, with a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in New York. The Virginia Company of Comedians, the first professional theatre company in the colonies, was established in 1751 in Williamsburg, VA. and in 1766, The Southwark Theatre, the first permanent American theatre, was built in Philadelphia.

19th Century Melodrama

During the 19th Century, melodrama was the primary form of theatre, reaching the height of popularity in the 1840s. The characteristics of melodrama include: the use of music (leitmotifs) to heighten the emotional impact of the play; moral simplicity in which good and evil are embodied in stock characters; special effects such as fire, earthquakes, and explosions; episodic format in which the villain poses a threat and the hero and heroine eventually escape and live happily ever after.

Dion Boucicault (1822-1890) wrote two of the most successful English-language melodramas, *The Corsican Brothers* (1852), based on a French novella by Alexandre Dumas, and *The Octoroon* (1859), which was one of the most popular antebellum melodramas in the United States, second to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. His work was witty and sentimental, with spectacular endings like train crashes, burning buildings, and earthquakes. Boucicault was the first playwright in the United States to ask for and receive royalties for performances of his plays. This was critical to the establishment of The International Copyright Agreement of 1886.

New trends in the theatre of the 19th Century included the creation of "stock companies" in which a group of actors played a variety of roles in a large

number of plays each season. They received a set salary for the season, regardless of the roles they played. Another trend was the star system, where English actors would tour with resident companies, making huge salaries. After 1850, the size of the repertory decreased as the length of runs increased. It was harder to recoup investments, and some actors in the company might not be in some of the shows, yet still received their salary. New York became the theatrical center of the United States by the 1880s, with actors going there to be hired. By 1900, the repertory system disintegrated and was replaced by the single play/long run. The large size of theatres in New York encouraged spectacle rather than intimate dramas.

Realism

Realism in theatre came in response to the social changes taking place in the mid to late 19th Century. Men like Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud helped shape the way society viewed the human condition. Theatre, then, became a mirror of society, acting as a direct observation of human behavior. Scenery and costumes became historically accurate, and scripts were written about socially uncomfortable issues. **Henrik Ibsen** (1828 – 1906), is known as the father of modern realistic drama. He discarded asides and soliloquies in favor of exposition revealing the character's inner psychological motivation. His characters are influenced by their environment. His plays tackled topics like the role of women in society, syphilis, euthanasia, and war. He became the model for later realistic writers. *A Doll's House*, written in 1879, was banned in many countries, because the protagonist, Nora Helmer, leaves her husband and children at the play's conclusion.

Other realistic writers include **Anton Chekov** (1860 – 1904) in Russia, who wrote plays about psychological realities where people are trapped by their social situations. Examples: *Three Sisters* (1900) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1902). **George Bernard Shaw** (1856 – 1950) in England was known for his sharp wit. He wrote comedies that were thought-provoking and challenged societal norms. In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Shaw uses prostitution to expose the injustice and hypocrisy in British society. In *Pygmalion*, later turned into the musical, *My Fair Lady*, he reveals the superficiality of society by having a flower girl be elevated

to a lady of society, merely by changing her pattern of speech. Shaw was specific and opinionated about the production of his plays and is one of the premier playwrights of the 20th Century.

Modern Theatre

For much of the 20th Century, realism was the most prevalent form of theatre. Musical theatre grew out of the tradition of minstrel shows and vaudeville and became the most commercially popular form of theatre. Early in the century saw the establishment of African American Theatre. **Bert Williams** and **George Walke**r had been a successful comedy team in vaudeville. In 1903, Williams and Walker opened ***In Dahomey***, the first full-length, all-black musical on a major Broadway stage. It ran for 1,100 performances and then went to England. A truncated version of the show was performed for the King at Buckingham palace on June 27, 1903. Bert Williams joined Ziegfeld's Follies of 1910 and became the first African American performer in the Follies. By this time, he was earning as much money as the President of the United States.

The Harlem Renaissance was a rich period for the arts in New York. Centered in Harlem, it spanned from approximately 1918 through the mid-1930s. African American arts and literature gained national attention. It celebrated the emergence from enslavement and cultural ties to Africa. Prominent performers included Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong, Paul Robeson, and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. Of writers and playwrights at this time, Zora Neale Hurston, Eulalie Spence, and Langston Hughes number among them. **Langston Hughes** wrote his play, *Mulatto*, in 1935, and it ran on Broadway for 373 performances, making it the longest-running African American drama until *A Raisin in the Sun* in 1959.

Another 20th Century playwright, **Eugene O'Neill** (1888-1953), is credited with raising American dramatic theatre to an art form respected around the world. His career had three distinct periods: realism, where he mined his experiences as a sailor; expressionism, when his plays were influenced by philosopher

Freidrich Neitzsche, psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, and playwright August Strindberg; and a return to realism, where he again used his own life experiences. O'Neill is considered America's premier playwright. His work was much lauded, and in 1936 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was awarded four Pulitzer Prizes: (1920) *Beyond the Horizon*; (1922) *Anna Christie*; (1928) *Strange Interlude*; and (posthumously in 1957) *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

Tennessee Williams had several Broadway successes during his career. Along with O'Neill and **Arthur Miller**, he is considered to be one of the most important American playwrights of the 20th Century. He wrote from his life experiences, broaching topics like homosexuality, promiscuity, and emotional abuse in his plays. His strong female characters are evident from the beginning of his career, as seen in *The Glass Menagerie* (1945). In 1947, A *Streetcar Named Desire* opened on Broadway with Jessica Tandy and Marlon Brando, and it won the 1948 Pulitzer prize. His second Pulitzer Prize was awarded for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, in 1955. Both were made into motion pictures.

Contemporary Black Theatre

In 1965, following the assassination of Malcolm X, **LeRoi Jones,** later **Amiri Baraka** (1934 – 2014), established the **Black Arts Repertory Theatre** in Harlem, NY. His desire was to create a Black aesthetic in American theatre and inspire future black theatres. The mission was to make theatre, "by us, about us, and for us." Many of his plays, including *The Dutchman*, were staged there in the 1960s.

August Wilson (1945 – 2005) earned popular and critical success with his plays about the African American experience. His "**American Century Cycle**" (also called The Pittsburgh Cycle) is a series of ten plays, one for each decade, chronicling racial issues in the twentieth century. Wilson is quoted as saying, "I write about the black experience in America…because it is a human experience. And contained within that experience are all the universalities."

Is That It?

This is just a brushing of the surface of the rich history of theatre. A chapter is not enough space to write about the marvels of performance and creation that have occurred across the centuries, but I hope this piques your interest and possibly inspires you to read some of the plays mentioned in the different eras.

Why Shakespeare? A Conversation with Laura Cole by Kiara Pipino

https://folgertheatre.wordpress.com/2011/11/21/shakespeare-changes-your-brain/

[redacted]

KEY WORDS

19th Century Melodrama (*Dion Boucicault, the Corsican Brothers*)
Contemporary Black Theatre (*Amiri Baraka, Black Arts Repertory Theatre, August Wilson, American Century Cycle*)
French Neoclassicism and the Rise of Romanticism (*Pierre Corneille, Moliere, neoclassicism*)
Greeks (*Dithyrambs, tragedy, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripedes, protagonist, deuteragonist, tritagonist, theatron, orchestra, skene, paraskene, masks.*)
Medieval (*liturgical drama, Hroswitha, platea, mansions, Mystery Cycles, Morality plays, Master of Secrets, Mummers plays*)
Modern Theatre (*Bert Wiliams, George Walker, In Dahomey, The Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller*)
Realism (*Henrik Ibsen, modern realistic drama, Anton Chekov, George Bernard Shaw*)
Renaissance (*Teatro Olimpico, Teatro Farnese, commedia dell'arte, The Theatre, groundlings, autos sacramentales, Comedias Nuevas, corrales, Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Pedro Calderon de la Barca*)
Restoration Theatre (*Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle, Mrs. Aphra Behn, Wm. Congreve, Wm. Wycherly, Oliver Goldsmith*)
Romans (*fabula palliata, scaenae frons, closet dramas, De Architectura*)

1 Aristotle,*The Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. S. H. Butcher, (London, Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1922) part VI.
2 Ferris-Hill, Jennifer. *Horace's Ars Poetica FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP, AND THE ART OF LIVING*. 1 ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019.
3 "mumming play | drama | Britannica." Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/art/mumming-play. Accessed 16 July 2022.
4 Creator: Edmund TylneyTitle: Accounts etc. Parts 13 to 33: Part 13 is the account of Edmund Tylney for the year 1 November 1604 to 31 October 1605, appending a list of plays performed at Court which includes seven by Shakespeare.Date: 1604-1605Repository: The National Archives, Kew, UK
5 "In Dahomey", London – 1903 – *Jeffrey Green. Historian*." Jeffrey Green. Historian, https://jeffreygreen.co.uk/in-dahomey-london-1903/. Accessed 18 July 2022
6 Jackson R. Breyer and Mary c. Hartig, *Conversations with August Wilson*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2006, p.109.
7 Shakespeare's theatre company was originally called The Lord Chamberlain's Men – after Lord Chamberlain, who was their sponsor. Then in 1603, when King James I ascended the throne and became Shakespeare's patron, the company's name changed into The King's Men.
8 The First Folio was the first antology of Shakespeare's plays, published by his company after the author's death, in 1623. The Folio has been arranged and edited in the year 2000 by Neil Freeman.
9 Adren Shakespeare and Folger Shakespeare are two popular collections of edited Shakespeare's works.
10 Shakespeare never published any of his plays during his lifetime to avoid making his work available to other companies of the time.
11 The Globe Playhouse was Shakespeare's theatre and it featured a round ground plan, with the stage extending into the audience in the form of a thrust stage. A roof only covered the stage area, while the audience stood in an open "courtyard". A reproduction of the Globe theatre has been built in London and it houses Shakespeare's productions all year round. There is also a reproduction of the Globe in the USA, at the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, VA.
12 During Shakespeare's time, women were not allowed to act on stage,

therefore women's roles were played by men, who were trained to do so from a young age.
13 During Shakespeare's time, performances happened during the daytime and there was artificial lighting, so there was no way to isolate the stage from the audience.
14 Juliet's father.
15 Play-on is a term that refers to versions of Shakespeare's plays that have been translated in modern English, and edited.
16 The Iambic Pentameter, which is the meter Shakespeare used when writing in verse, has a specific rhythm that dictates the way you speak the line.
17 Suzuki and Viewpoints are two acting techniques based on highly complex movement patterns.
18 The play is misogynistic approach to marriage.

13 Applied Theatre

Krysta Dennis

What is Applied Theatre?

The term "applied theatre" became popular in the United Kingdom in the 1990s to describe theatre practices that were outside the mainstream of theatre-making, featured the goal of social justice or activism, and tended to serve communities and individuals, often part of vulnerable or marginalized groups. The term has recently gained currency outside of the United Kingdom to describe this type of theatre practice. **Applied theatre** has become an umbrella term that encompasses a diverse range of theatre practices, including the Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre in Education, Drama Therapy, Prison Theatre, Museum Theatre, Documentary/verbatim Theatre, and more. It is by nature a hybrid practice, with therapists, psychologists, social workers, museum professionals, sociologists, anthropologists, and more, engaging in applied theatre-making. Broadly speaking, applied theatre happens in non-traditional spaces and serves marginalized communities. Applied theatre seeks to address issues beyond the theatrical form itself.

Applied theatre often features both trained theatre-makers as well as untrained participants. Audiences are either somehow invested in the issues that are explored in the context of the theatrical intervention, or part of the community that is featured in the work.

The Predecessors of Applied Theatre

Contemporary applied theatre has as its predecessors, left-wing Radical Theatre, Theatre in Education, and Community Theatre. A variety of sources, including the agitprop and Workers Theatre Movement of the 1920s, the epic

theatre of Bertolt Brecht, the poor theatre of Jerzy Grotowski, and Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop set the stage for applied theatre as we know it today.

Theatre as a teaching tool became popular in the United States in the 1920s, but theatre had been produced in educational settings for hundreds of years before that— at least since the school drama of the 16th Century; for example, the play *Ralph Roister Doister* (1530s) by Nicholas Udall, headmaster at Eton and Westminster. Further plays for education were furnished in this time period by the "university wits" including Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), Thomas Kyd (1558-1594), and John Lyly (1554-1606). Teachers who employ theatre-making in their curricula will attest to the valuable transferable skills students gain from working on a theatrical production, including increased self-confidence, better spatial awareness, the ability to speak in front of a crowd, the ability to meet a deadline, increased empathy and tolerance, imagination and ability to make creative choices, the ability to concentrate and focus, memorization skills, and problem-solving and thinking on your feet. They might also highlight the social benefits as well as the personal ones: children and young adults who work in theatre benefit from being part of a unified group that works together to achieve a goal, develop skills in collaboration and cooperation, and learn how to trust and be trusted by their peers. Studies show that students involved in theatre in education show improved academic performance, better attendance, better reading comprehension, and better self-esteem than their peers. Similar studies show contemporary forms of applied theatre including Theatre in Education, Prison Theatre, and Drama Therapy yield similar results.

Community theatre refers to theatre-making that is made as part of a regional community. Many community theatres are thriving non-for-profits with a great deal of active participation and local stakeholders. Community theatre can feature combinations of professional theatre artists and community members, or theatre made exclusively by members of the community. This term may include amateur theatre, which usually features unpaid actors performing a play for a local audience. In many communities, access to professional theatre is limited, and community theatre provides a theatrical outlet for performers and an opportunity to see live theatre for audiences that may not often get the chance to do so.

Historically, theatre has often provided a space in which to speak truth to

power. It is an outlet in which stories can be told without necessarily featuring direct criticism of unjust social frameworks and instances of oppression. A recent example is the 2000 play *The Exonerated*, by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, a piece of Documentary Theatre (to be discussed later in this chapter) that features verbatim stories collected by Blank and Jensen from former death row inmates who were exonerated of their crimes. While opinions about the death penalty might be extremely polarized in the United States, and Americans might find it very difficult to discuss the subject altogether, the play simply presents the stories of people who were wrongfully accused, and what it did to their lives, and how their exoneration impacted them. It allows a hotly contested subject to be explored artistically through the words of those impacted in reality. Further back in history we can see this in festivals like Carnival, where the servants played the masters, and in *commedia dell'arte* plays in which servants outsmart their masters. This commedia trope finds its way into the written plays of Shakespeare (*King Lear*'s Fool, for example, speaking truth to Lear's power), Molière (the wily servant Dorine and her dopey and easily manipulated master Orgon in *Tartuffe*), and Goldoni (Truffaldino managing two masters for double the pay, unbeknownst to both, in *The Servant of Two Masters*.)

Playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht, Henrik Ibsen, and George Bernard Shaw placed social issues of their day onstage and interpreted them through a critical lens to attempt to educate, inform, and develop empathy within their audiences. Contemporary applied theatre seeks to either undermine the status quo in the tradition of these playwrights, such as in the case of Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre in Education, and Prison Theatre, or alternately to celebrate and commemorate important events or elements of local culture, as Museum Theatre and Reminiscence Theatre do.

Scripts

While traditional theatre tends to feature a script authored by a playwright, put onstage by a director, and interpreted by actors, these structures are much less rigid in the case of applied theatre. The subject matter of applied theatre is often generated by the participants under the leadership of the facilitator(s).

Applied theatre is often created with the goal of stimulating conversation and discussions of potential solutions to the problems addressed in the work, rather than seeking masterful acting techniques or creative directorial or design concepts. In many cases, a formal script is never recorded. Much applied theatre depends on verbatim texts from the community about the issue at stake or reliance on improvisation. Often, endings in applied theatre remain open for interpretation, discussion, and inquiry. The theatrical representations are meant to mirror real life. Augusto Boal, the creator of the Theatre of the Oppressed, was known to quote Hamlet's argument that theatre is like a mirror that reflects both our virtues and defects equally.

The Facilitator

There are many terms for this person— the Joker, as Augusto Boal preferred (hearkening back to the idea of the fool, or jester, who speaks truth to power), the teaching artist, teacher-artist, or co-creator, but facilitator seems to be the most common. A facilitator must have a transdisciplinary approach, featuring not only an understanding of how theatre is made but also the ability to utilize theatre as a pedagogical tool. They must also have a good working knowledge of the context of the community they are working with in order to avoid cultural misunderstandings, or worse, creating theatrical interventions that have little value to the community in which they take place. Sometimes the facilitator takes on the role of director, dramaturg, playwright, or simply empathetic listener. Facilitation requires a good deal of skill and experience as a theatre practitioner, and, depending on the type of work being facilitated, experience in the areas of health education, therapy, social work, or other relevant expertise.

A facilitator tries to be as neutral as possible, trying not to bring preconceived notions or an agenda to the applied theatre project. One cannot, of course, be completely neutral, and facilitators must acknowledge this fact, and actively try to combat the biases they bring with them. One of the advantages of having a facilitator who is from outside the group or community working on the applied theatre project is the distance the facilitator can bring, and the ability to see a broader perspective than the localized one addressed in the project. A good

facilitator must be prepared to think on their feet and keep in mind the goal of serving the community involved in the project. The facilitator's job lies in finding the balance between aesthetics (theatrical performance) and exploring social issues. Facilitators must be ready to manage potentially complex interpersonal dynamics and walk the line between art and activism.

Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the Oppressed is a theatrical form created by Brazilian theatre practitioner and activist **Augusto Boal** (1931-2009). While Boal began his career as a more conventional theatre-maker, he was a vocal advocate for Brazilian playwrights when he was director of the Arena Theatre of Sao Paulo. In 1964, a *coup d'état* occurred in Brazil, and the new military regime found Boal's theatre practices threatening. He was kidnapped, arrested, tortured, and exiled to Argentina. It was during this time that Boal conceived of the Theatre of the Oppressed, and wrote an acclaimed book of the same name. The book details Boal's theatre-making method based on his friend and colleague Paulo Freire's theory and subsequent book on *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

Boal's work underwent a complete shift after an occasion in which an audience member stepped onstage, breaking the fourth wall and intervening in the action of the play. After this, Boal maintained that traditional theatrical productions were oppressive, as they did not allow spectators the freedom of expression given to the artists creating the piece. Boal saw theatre as an opportunity to create meaningful dialogue between groups of people, and a pedagogical method that empowers the community and avoids an elitist "top-down" structure. Boal coined the term "spect-actor" to describe the empowered participant in the Theatre of the Oppressed, bringing together the terms "spectator" and "actor."

Boal worked with marginalized populations around South America, and later around the world. After 14 years of exile, Boal returned to Brazil after the fall of

the dictatorship in 1986 and established a Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed.

Boal created and utilized a number of methods of theatre-making within the framework of the Theatre of the Oppressed, which he details in *The Rainbow of Desire* and *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Some examples of Boal's theatre-making frameworks include Image Theatre, Invisible Theatre, and Forum Theatre. He also details an extensive number of exercises in *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* that he refers to as the "arsenal" of the Theatre of the Oppressed.

In **Image Theatre**, participants are asked to demonstrate their opinion on a global or local issue— Boal gives examples of imperialism or water shortages in the local community. The participant is asked to express their opinion without words, using the bodies of other participants as if they were a sculptor, and create a tableau that expresses their feelings on the subject. Speaking is not allowed for any of the parties involved during the exercise. After the sculpture is complete, then they discuss how the sculptor represented their opinion. The group is then able to modify the image, with the actual image transmuting into the ideal image via a transitional image. In other words, how can reality be transformed into a better version of itself?

In Invisible Theatre, spect-actors construct a short play based on an issue of great importance to them. The actors play as if playing a role in a traditional theatre for a traditional audience. It will not, however, be performed in a traditional theatre for a traditional audience— it will be performed in a public space as if it is real life unfolding. Invisible theatre shows oppression in everyday life, without the "audience" knowing they are witnessing theatre.

In **Forum Theatre**, which is at the heart of the Theatre of the Oppressed, the performers present a scene that features a social or political problem with a difficult solution faced by the community. The scene should be 10-15 minutes. After it has been played, the participants are asked if they agree with the solution presented. The scene is then run a second time and the "spect-actors" are invited to replace the characters and attempt to change the outcome of the scene. The performers have to improvise and consider all the possibilities presented by the spect-actors intervention. It is important that the person who suggests a different outcome does not just do so from their seat— it is important they try to enact the changes they wish to see in order to experience

the potential obstacles.

The **Joker** is fundamental to the success of the forum theatre performance, facilitating the interactions between the audience and the characters. Boal also refers to the Joker as a "difficultator" rather than a facilitator, because they must steer participants away from simplistic or unrealistic solutions. It is not easy to change people's minds, and not easy to change the world, and the Joker must make sure this is clear. Another mechanism helps to make Forum Theatre a useful tool for playing out potential solutions to complex problems— the spect-actors are asked to shout out "magic" if they believe a solution presented by another spect-actor to be too facile or unrealistic.

In 1992, Boal was elected to the city council of Rio de Janeiro. This led him to conceive of a new form of theatre practice that would provide a way for citizens to engage in democratic processes, entitling this form "legislative theatre." Legislative theatre was similar to forum theatre but is directly focused on policies and laws that could solve problems. This theatre-making practice actually resulted in the enaction of some new laws in the city and is still practiced today— notably in New York City.

Forum theatre as Boal outlined, as well as other variations on Theatre of the Oppressed, abound today in applied theatre practice, and Boal remains one of the most important figures in the history and continued practice of applied theatre.

Theatre in Education

In this section, we will explore Theatre in Education (TIE) and Theatre in Health Education (THE). Theatre in Education tends to take place in the context of schools, while Theatre in Health Education can take place in a multitude of community spaces, including schools.

Theatre as an educational tool has been used since at least the 16th Century and likely before, as noted above, but the contemporary understanding of **Theatre in Education** (TIE) stems from British TIE practice in the 1960s. At that time, progressive government policies for community-based arts funding

encouraged theatre-makers to begin working in school settings, rather than children attending the theatre in more traditional spaces. Actor-teachers began working outside the proscenium model and taking into account the student as both audience and participant, and how to work within the curriculum of the school. This also allowed teachers to work with theatre-makers and develop new theatre-based strategies for teaching their curriculum in the classroom.

Theatre in Education features teaching as its primary goal. It usually targets age-specific, but diverse, students of mixed gender and ability. TIE directly engages with the student audiences by encouraging participation on their part. Some TIE productions feature professional actors performing for students, some TIE productions feature only student performers, and some a mix of both. No matter the style, students participate actively in the theatre-making process. Both school-based theatre programs and organizations that bring their programs into schools are classified as TIE. James Hennessy, TIE practitioner and theoretician states, "Central to the TIE work…are the twin convictions that human behavior and institutions are formed through social activity and can therefore be changed, and that audiences, as potential agents of change, should be active participants in their own learning."

Theatre in Education features differing approaches to children of different ages. For elementary school children, TIE is geared more towards play for play's sake, rather than performance for an audience. The purpose of this theatre-making for the sake of it nurtures creativity, play, self-expression, and personal growth, as well as addresses curricular subject matter. Developmental Drama practitioner and theorist Brian Way suggests that this style is meant "to develop people, not drama." In secondary education, drama continues to be used to develop creativity and teach curriculum subjects but is more geared toward performance and production techniques.

Theatre in Health Education (THE) takes the main methodologies and principles of Theatre in Education and applies them in a health education setting, dealing with issues of drug abuse, child abuse, parenting, safety, physical and mental health, driving, clean water, organ donation, bedside manner for physicians, and general wellbeing. Theatre in Health Education was galvanized by the global AIDS/HIV crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. Traditional methods of spreading information about the danger of unsafe sex were

ineffectual in many cases (particularly in parts of the world where the concept was counter-cultural), and THE was found to be an effective strategy in combatting the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Theatre in Health Education has become a common practice in schools and communities, and is a means to educate healthcare workers in developing best practices with patients. It often addresses issues that are taboo to discuss in public, from women's health to sexuality, and child abuse. THE often seeks to uplift suppressed voices and can use a range of theatrical devices to navigate difficult topics including puppetry, masks, presentational styles, or new twists on familiar theatrical forms.

Theatre in Health Education in Africa during the AIDS crisis borrowed from traditional African storytelling forms in order to bring a taboo subject into the public forum. Practitioners such as C.J. Odhiambo encode seemingly unrelated narratives with issues of HIV/AIDS that audiences can identify, safely couching the difficult subject matter (talking about safe sex) in metaphor and symbol. This enables his company to reach a population that is uncomfortable talking about sex in a public forum. The Problem Solving Theatre Project in Durban, South Africa, directly explores personal and practical solutions to the problems posed by HIV/AIDS in peoples' lives by utilizing Boalian forum theatre and asking audiences to directly participate and actively discuss HIV/AIDS prevention and living with the disease.

Theatre in Health Education practices are not only used to promote healthy practices among members of the public but for members of the medical profession to develop better bedside manner with their patients. Standardized patient programs have begun to spring up around the world to help medical students and doctors learn best practices in treating real patients with respect and empathy. In standardized patient programs, professional actors play through patient scenarios in which the medical students or doctors counsel, interview, examine, and develop plans for treatment for the "patient." The doctors or medical students then receive feedback from the actor-patient and/or from the standardized patient program.

Drama Therapy

Drama Therapy is essentially a form of psychotherapy. Drama therapists must be trained as both clinicians and theatre-makers to draw on theatre techniques as a medium for psychological therapy that may include forms of drama and theatre such as improvisation, storytelling, role-playing, puppetry and mask, and fully developed dramatic performances. Drama therapists deal with issues ranging from dementia to autism, to physical or emotional abuse, and mental health issues.

One of the earliest forms of Drama Therapy was **Psychodrama,** developed in the 1920s in Europe by **J.L. Moreno** and Zerka Toeman Moreno, then practiced and developed in the United States. Psychodrama, which is still in use today, features an action-based experiential form of therapy that allows for the exploration of past trauma or conflict through re-enacting and re-experiencing the event and working through dynamic improvements through the medium of group performance. The form was not, however, recognized as an academic discipline until the 1970s, led by universities in the United States and the United Kingdom. Now, many colleges and universities offer programs in Drama Therapy that blend psychological and theatrical study. Robert Landy, the founder of NYU's Drama Therapy program, states that Drama Therapy has "distanced itself from the medical mode of diagnosis and illness, embracing holistic models of wellness as an alternative notion of assessing clients (rather than patients) through the art form." Though the main goals of Drama Therapy are consistent with the goals of applied theatre— positive social change or empowerment for groups or individuals— the primary difference between Drama Therapy and other forms of applied theatre is that the drama therapist is not only a trained theatre-maker but a trained and licensed therapist who follows the codes of conduct, of confidentiality, informed consent, "do no harm," and the Hippocratic oath. Many forms of applied theatre focus on political and social change, while Drama Therapy focuses on the inner workings of the individual. While psychodrama featured a client playing themselves as the protagonist in the relationship or situation being examined, with other group members playing the other characters, contemporary drama therapists often ask the client to play someone other than themselves in the situation, or even to distill the situation down to archetypes rather than the specifics of the actual event.

Close relatives of psychodrama are **sociodrama**, sociometry, and **Playback Theatre**. Most of these forms spring from the work of Moreno, who was a

physician by training. Moreno worked with veterans, sex workers, the homeless, prisoners, and people with mental health problems. Sociometry is a qualitative method for measuring social relationships. It is meant to examine the relationship between social structures and psychological well-being. Moreno believed that sociometry revealed the underlying structures of a group, and sociometric exercises can often be useful to gain knowledge about a group in tandem with Drama Therapy. Sociodrama is the group version of psychodrama— it is meant to aid a group in crisis. For example, Moreno used sociodrama at a professional psychiatric conference in order to examine the group trauma of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and attempt to create a cathartic experience for the group, assisting them in expressing repressed emotions. Moreno describes sociodrama as:

> based upon the tacit assumption that the group formed by the audience is already organized by the social and cultural roles which in some degree all the carriers of the culture share…an action method in which individuals enact and agreed upon social situation spontaneously.

Jonathan Fox (who studied with Moreno) and **Jo Salas** developed Playback Theatre in the 1970s. It is an improvisational theatre that features communal storytelling. In Playback, a community gathers, and the conductor (the name chosen for the leader of Playback Theatre) invites a member of the community to tell a story of concern to the community. The Playback actors then recreate the story in performance, often accompanied by music. The storyteller then reflects on the performance. This is followed by multiple other storytellers building upon the communities' stories. The main distinction here is that the Playback actors, while they might be members of the community, are trained performers.

Drama Therapy is a growing field and features many different approaches and techniques. Most Drama Therapy is a private therapeutic practice in which the clients are both the performers and spectators. The exception to this is Therapeutic Theatre, a more public form in which a population that sought Drama Therapy performs for an invited audience. This practice blurs the lines somewhat between Drama Therapy and other areas of applied theatre. Because Drama Therapy is commonly closed to the public and confidential, the practice develops within the practice of individuals and groups of drama therapists.

Some consider the practice to be entirely separate from applied theatre, but often, as in the case of this chapter, it is discussed in the broader world of applied theatre.

Reminiscence Theatre

Reminiscence Theatre, or Theatre for the Elderly, is a form of applied theatre that creates a framework for the elderly to participate in theatre-making practice. Participants are asked to recall memories of a moment in cultural or personal history and to tell the story of these memories, upon which performances are developed by professional actors or the elderly participants themselves.

In contemporary culture, we often focus on youth culture, and Reminiscence Theatre practices suggest that not only is there value in making theatre from the memories of elderly people for their own sake, but for the sake of creating interesting, meaningful art. There are also multi-generational models of Reminiscence Theatre, including groups of young performers eliciting stories and memories from a group of seniors which they then perform back to the seniors, a group of senior performers might create pieces based on their memories for younger audiences, or younger theatre-makers (students, professionals, or both) come together and create the work with elderly performers with the goal of bringing the intergenerational work to the community. Antionette Ford, the founder of Double Nickels Theatre Company, states:

> Reminiscence theatre is a valuable way for seniors to contribute to our cultural sustainability and creative aging efforts. We recall the events that shape what we become. These events inform the narrative, highlight that which would be marginalized, and can serve as examples of a broader history.

Ford's work includes a project of Reminiscence Theatre that celebrated the 100 Year Anniversary of the National Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington D.C. in which she interviewed ten centenarians and built a performance around their

memories of the trees arriving in Washington. The production featured professional actors, as well as the Japanese ambassador.

Another example of a thriving company practicing Reminiscence Theatre is the Age Exchange in London, which has been doing so for nearly 40 years. Age Exchange serves people suffering from dementia and provides opportunities for them to continue to contribute to society through reminiscence arts including, but not limited to, Reminiscence Theatre (the group also provides visual art opportunities). Age Exchange works with embodied memory in a variety of art forms and reports that the technique is highly effective in working with vulnerable older people, specifically those with dementia.

Practitioners of Reminiscence Theatre argue that it is beneficial not only to the elderly but to younger generations who can learn from and foster communication with the elderly. With people living longer, healthier lives today, Reminiscence Theatre provides an interesting outlet for the elderly to remain part of an intergenerational conversation through theatre practice.

Documentary Theatre

Documentary Theatre is a form of applied theatre that utilizes previously published newspaper stories, interviews, governmental documents, statistics, and trial transcripts as its scripts, among other documents. Delivering factual information or opinions on a particular subject that showcase opposing viewpoints can create a great deal of dramatic action. While there are many styles of creating Documentary Theatre, from DV8's physical theatre and dance-based approach to Anna Deavere Smith's single monologist approach, this genre as a whole seeks to provoke community discussion and cause audience members to consider the subject addressed from differing perspectives, sometimes divergent from their own.

The roots of Documentary Theatre lie in Eastern European agitprop theatre (a portmanteau of agitation and propaganda— theatre that aimed to educate or indoctrinate the audience). The USSR, in the years following the Russian revolution, employed acting troupes known as Blue Blouses who dramatized

current events and news stories as a "Living Newspaper." The concept of the Living Newspaper soon spread throughout Europe and the United States, even featuring in the depression era Federal Theatre Project, started by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the 1930s. This style of theatre-making evolved into the Documentary Theatre projects we know today. However, rather than attempting to indoctrinate the public, contemporary Documentary Theatre provides audiences with a closer look into a particular viewpoint on a subject or the perspective of an individual who may be different than themselves.

DV8 Physical Theatre Company illustrates how documentary materials and dance can be combined to create interesting and engaging pieces of theatre. Founder Lloyd Newson has created movement and dance pieces that are accompanied by dialogue and projections that are based on interviews, current events, and statistics. Their 2005 production of *To Be Straight With You* explored issues of tolerance, intolerance, religion, and sexuality. The company used the same techniques for its impactful 2012 production *Can We Talk About This?* which addresses questions of free speech, Islam, and multiculturalism.

A subcategory of Documentary Theatre is verbatim theatre, which makes use of testimonies from witnesses or other people involved in the event or issue depicted. Some of the most well-known pieces of Documentary Theatre fit into this genre, including the work of Erik Jensen and Jessica Blank, Anna Deavere Smith, and Moises Kaufman and Tectonic Theatre Project. Erik Jensen and Jessica Blank's *The Exonerated*, mentioned previously, utilizes first-person narrative and legal records to tell the stories of six wrongfully convicted people who were exonerated from death row, using a company of ten actors. Over the summer of 2000, Blank and Jensen interviewed forty former death row inmates who had been freed in order to create the production. Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Project's *The Laramie Project*, also performed in 2000, is a piece of verbatim theatre based on the murder of gay University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard and the impact on the Laramie community. The theatre company conducted hundreds of interviews with the inhabitants of the town and built the production on those as well as journal entries written by the company members and published news reports. Tectonic returned to Laramie ten years after the murder to conduct another round of interviews, creating the companion piece *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, which featured many of the original cast members. Anna Deavere Smith's earlier verbatim work, *Fires in the Mirror*, is a 1992 production that explores the 1991 Crown

Heights riot in Brooklyn. Deavere Smith interviewed 100 people who were impacted by the riot and crafted the interviews into a one-person show that she performed herself. Deavere Smith's skill as a mimic allows her to personally portray a series of observers and commentators on the event with subtle costuming distinctions, such as the addition of a hat, jacket, or quick change of hairstyle.

Documentary Theatre is a growing field and an interesting artistic intervention with which to explore subjective experiences and events. This allows theatre-makers to inform audiences in a factual manner about a subject as well as engage in interpretation and promote community discussion, and even action.

Museum Theatre

Museum Theatre utilizes theatrical productions or techniques to interpret, or render accessible to a contemporary audience, the historical background of the museum. Museum Theatre includes site-specific theatrical productions, storytelling, and living history demonstrations to interpret the museum's history and collections. Once a rare occurrence particular to specific sites, Museum Theatre has become a much more common practice. Museums that utilize Museum Theatre as their primary focus are often referred to as living history museums.

One Museum Theatre technique is first-person interpretation, in which an actor, usually a professional, interacts directly with visitors to the site as a historic figure related to the site. The performer will adapt the worldviews and knowledge appropriate to the historical figure they portray. An early example of this technique is Colonial Williamsburg. Started in the 1920s, the site features a 301-acre part of the historic district of Williamsburg, Virginia interpreted as it would have been in the colonial era. Costumed actors perform the daily lives of 18th Century Americans, often using colonial grammar and diction. While Colonial Williamsburg has been criticized for presenting a "cleaned-up" version of Colonial America and historically neglecting the stories of free African Americans, the site is an extraordinary early example of Museum Theatre.

In second-person interpretations, the audience assumes roles themselves along with the interpreters, playing a character or doing an action from the time period. This can be as simple as churning butter or making candles, to playing the role of an enslaved person seeking freedom in the "North Star" program at Connor Prairie Interactive History Park in Indiana, in order to learn about the underground railroad.

In third-person interpretation, the performer does not inhabit the character strictly and can step out of the role to acknowledge the time period of the visitors. For example, at the Wampanoag Homesite at Plimoth Plantation, the costumed performer will tell visitors about 18th Century Wampanoag life from a contemporary angle while simultaneously embodying it.

Performers in Museum Theatre must walk the line between actor and historian — they must be well-versed in the history that they represent, but also have the sensitivities of actors working in site-specific settings with audience members. First, second, and third-person interpretations often feature elements of storytelling, demonstrations, and scenes or short productions that are relevant to the site. Audiences may arrive at the museum unaware that they will encounter theatre, and Museum Theatre-makers must navigate the challenges of repeating performances multiple times of day and accomplishing particular tasks, as well as improvising effectively and appropriately when addressed by a visitor. Fort Ticonderoga in Upstate New York illustrates this effectively with its combination of first-person performances, second-person activities, and third-person interpretations.

Museum Theatre provides an opportunity for communities to learn about their cultural heritage, or a part of history we hope to avoid repeating. Imagining oneself in a different time period makes for memorable experiences, and audiences are afforded an opportunity to connect meaningfully with their own culture's history or that of another culture. Research shows that visitors to historic sites are more likely to remember what they encountered there if the information was delivered through storytelling or theatrical intervention.

Prison Theatre

Though we can trace theatrical performance in prisons back to at least the incarceration of the Marquis de Sade at Charenton Prison in France in the 18th Century, where he is said to have directed the inmates in plays, the first example we would understand as rehabilitative theatre in prisons would be Herb Blau's 1957 production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* at the San Quentin Prison in California, a performance that was attended by 1400 inmates. A play about feeling stuck, about, well…waiting… resonated profoundly with inmates. Theatre in prisons in the mid-twentieth century, including groups such as Cell Block Theatre, the Family, Theatre for the Forgotten, and Theatre Without Bars, mainly consisted of performing plays that resonated with inmates for therapeutic purposes.

Later in the 20th Century, however, a number of theatre practitioners came to understand that actually participating in theatre practice would be therapeutic to inmates. Rick Cluchey, a former inmate who was influenced by the production of *Waiting for Godot*, founded the San Quentin Drama Workshop, which produced plays performed by inmates. Now Prison Theatre programs abound, featuring the production of traditional scripts, but also Boalian forum theatre, clowning, Brecht's epic theatre, and performances devised by the inmates themselves. There are also many companies and individuals that participate in this kind of work, for example, Rehabilitation through the Arts (RTA) founded by Katherine Volkins at Sing-Sing in 1996, which now has many theatre practitioners and criminal justice professionals who volunteer to work in men's and women's prisons throughout New York State. Indeed, the goals of criminal justice professionals are aligned with applied theatre practitioners—working towards social change, community-building, and creating awareness around oppressive conditions.

Jefe Von Stanley produced a guide to exercises and workshop experiences for prisoners in his *The Geese Theatre Handbook*, based on the international Geese Theatre Company's work in prisons since 1987. Other founding company members John Bergman and Saul Hewish have shared the company's techniques in *Challenging Experience: An Experiential Approach for the Treatment of Serious Offenders.*

Shakespeare Behind Bars, founded in 1995, has also been a significant Prison Theatre company, focusing on restorative justice— a method for inmates to explore social and personal issues through theatre-making. The company was

founded by director Curt L. Tuftland and psychologist Julie Barto at the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in LaGrange, Kentucky. A film, *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, details the work of the company on a production of *The Tempest* in the Kentucky prison. Shakespeare's very relevant themes of love, violence, vengeance, forgiveness, and family provide an avenue for prisoners to connect with and explore these themes in their own lives through the exploration of the plays.

Theatre practice is associated with helping the incarcerated to develop social skills, renewed self-confidence and a sense of their own worth, positive attitudes, and behavioral changes. Participants who take part in theatre programs while incarcerated have much lower recidivism rates than the general population of the formerly incarcerated.

Theatre for Development

Theatre for Development (TfD) is a form of applied theatre used in developing communities worldwide to educate audiences or promote social or political change. Many other applied theatre-making practices are employed in the context of TfD, including Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre in Education, Theatre in Health Education, Drama Therapy, and Documentary Theatre. While TfD got its start in a fairly colonial framework (Developed world educators imposing western culture and ideals on developing world populations), TfD has seen some major transformations and today features a locally driven framework with the community concerned as the major stakeholder in the process. The form has also grown from a more didactic framework to a dialogic one, moving from less interactive to empowering communities to explore solutions to their problems through theatre. While many applied theatre practices are utilized in TfD, the most commonly employed today are Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques.

Conclusion

Though applied theatre is a field that is geared towards positive social change and helping individuals and communities, it is not without its challenges as a practice. For example, critics from the developing world have questioned the discourse on human rights, and whether some applied theatre practices are not simply vectors for globalization— methods by which global corporations create suitable conditions in new localities for their practices through the often unwitting practices of applied theatre facilitators. The tensions over whose definitions of human rights are "correct" are emphasized by the unequal power distribution in global politics, and the tendency of applied theatre to be brought to marginalized populations by those in positions of greater power.

Applied theatre practitioners must also consider the ethics of putting the stories of real people on stage. It is important for practitioners to secure participants' informed consent before the theatre-making begins, so as to establish an ethical environment in which to create.

Another issue for applied theatre is how its level of success can be measured. In traditional theatre, assessment is clear— productions are judged by critics and then by the attendance levels of the audience, which results in a financial return. Assessment of applied theatre is more complex. In some cases, such as reduced recidivism rates among inmates who participated in Prison Theatre, it is easy to measure the impact of applied theatre. However, how is the impact on a community measured when there are many other external factors at play besides theatre-making? While challenging to assess, applied theatre practitioners can take a number of factors into account: What was the quality and degree of participation amongst the group creating the theatre piece? What were the responses of the audience members (if different from the practitioners)? Was the plan for ethical theatre-making practices carried out? Did the community involved in the project display leadership in its creation? Did the project have a strong exit strategy? This last question is an important one— applied theatre facilitators should establish a plan of action for after their departure or the end of the theatrical intervention. How can participants take the next steps in enacting social change?

Applied theatre is practiced in order to enact social change and make the world a better place through theatrical explorations of issues ranging from the political to the personal. It is a growing field of theatre practice, and doubtless will grow and develop in the years to come, both into new and interesting

forms and expansions of existing ones. It is a practice that serves to empower, educate, enlighten, and inform spectators, spect-actors, audiences, and practitioners themselves.

KEY WORDS

Applied Theatre

Augusto Boal

Documentary Theatre

Drama Therapy

Forum Theatre

Image Theatre

Jo Salas

Moreno

Museum Theatre

Playback Theatre

Prison Theatre

Psychodrama

Reminiscence Theatre

Sociodrama

The Facilitator/The Joker

Theatre for Development

Theatre in Education

Theatre of the Oppressed

14 Musical Theatre

Emily Jones

The wildly popular theatrical genre known as musical theatre is often the gateway experience for newcomers to the world of theatre. Combining all three of the performing arts (dance, music, and theatre), it provides an opportunity for each audience member to find something they enjoy. The *razzle-dazzle* of the spectacle, powerful soaring voices, snazzy memorable tunes, and impeccable dancing seduce even the most reluctant of theatregoers. Audiences sit in wonder before the show begins, gazing at the often elaborate scenic design, and waiting on bated breath to be captivated by this compelling art form. The stories – the new, the newly adapted, and the old — invite audiences from across generations. It has been said, in fact, that musical theatre is the one original theatrical form solely contributed by America; though this comment is perhaps intended as a dig, judging by its Commercial Broadway success, this is an accolade we Americans can proudly hail.

A Bit of History

The Beginning

Open five different theatre textbooks and you will likely find five different starting points for tracing the origins of the musical. Some historians will link it all the way back to the Greeks' use of music and dance in plays, while others point to **Gilbert and Sullivan,** or Irish immigrants, and still, others begin with 18th and 19th Century comic opera, vaudeville, and burlesque**.** While the inclusion of music and dance in theatre has indeed existed for thousands of years and has certainly influenced the creation of musical theatre, a production

known as *The Black Crook* in 1866 is most often distinguished as the "first" musical, but even this title has now been categorized as **musical comedy** by today's standards.

"'My Egyptian Maids', B.E. Forrester presents Yorke & Adams in the musical comedy success Bankers and brokers by Aaron Hoffman, 1906." by Halloween HJB is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Musical comedy, as we've come to identify it today, would continue to delight audiences throughout the early 20th Century. But in 1927, Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's ***Show Boat*** would change the face of musical theatre. The production was the first to bring serious social issues to the stage depicting real people with real problems. *Show Boat* combined all the best elements of its predecessors in terms of structure – timing, song formulas, characters, and settings – and ventured into the world of *musical drama. Show Boat's* evolution of the musical sparked a wave of new work, ushering in the Golden Age of Musical Theatre.

The Golden Age

The 1930s and 40s would prove to be a challenging time for Americans. The Great Depression followed by World War II would leave the country in need of a welcome distraction to keep spirits bright. This resulted in the rise of some of the greatest American musical theatre composers and lyricists, such as **George and Ira Gershwin,** whose first major hit *Of Thee I Sing*, won the Pulitzer Prize for drama — the first musical to hold this honor. **Cole Porter** would also produce his smash hit, *Anything Goes*, full of catchy tunes such as "I Get a Kick Out of You," and "Blow, Gabriel, Blow". The *classic musical* would also emerge, created by one of the longest and most productive musical theatre partnerships in history between composer, Richard Rodgers, and lyricist, Oscar Hammerstein**.** Their first hit, *Oklahoma!* would change the rules of musical theatre forever and become one of the most important musicals in musical theatre history. We will take a deeper dive into this groundbreaking musical and how it changed the face of musical theatre later in the chapter.

Sutton Foster in Anything Goes, 2011 Revival "anything goes curtain call 080411" by Findstories is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The 1950s would charge onto the scene with popular titles such as *Guys and Dolls*, *My Fair Lady*, *West Side Story*, and *The Music Man*. Television and its growing popularity during this time were having an impact on musical theatre audiences, increasing popularity and making songs and stories more accessible. ***Guys and Dolls***, considered by most historians to be one of the most perfect musicals ever written, became popular for its memorable songs like "Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat" and "Bushel and a Peck" and its all too familiar plot line – a woman's need to find a man to marry – a plight all too familiar to women of this time. By the late 50s, the musical tragedy *West Side Story* would open, once again shifting the musical theatre scene with its groundbreaking ideas. We will explore this title in more detail later in the chapter.

The Unrest

The Civil Rights Movement presses forward and the entrance of the country into the Vietnam War marks two of the most significant factors in the ongoing unrest in the United States during this time. Consequently, audiences craved something different – no more conventional musicals and romantic notions. In sweeps *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, a clever satire mocking corporate America and paving the way for momentous change. Even the more traditional musicals, such as 1964's *Hello Dolly!*, would delight audiences with Dolly Levi's unpredictable nature and striking independence. Director, **Hal Prince**, and director/choreographer, **Bob Fosse,** would emerge as leaders in the industry, moving musical theatre to become more socially responsible. Groundbreaking productions such as *Cabaret* and *Hair* would pave the way for the 1970s and the introduction of the concept musical and one of today's most popular forms, the rock musical. George Furth and **Stephen Sondheim**'s *Company* (currently experiencing a brilliant 2021 revival on Broadway directed by Marianne Elliott), would emerge as the first concept musical. Critics were not in agreement as to whether *Company* was "good", but they did agree that it was different and brave for its changes to the common

musical theatre structure, most notably characters outside of the scene singing the songs as a commentary on what's happening within each couple's life. *Company* is one of many productions which became pillars of this era, including *Pippin*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Rocky Horror Show*, ***Chicago*,** and *A Chorus Line*, which we will study in greater detail later in the chapter.

The Commercialization of Broadway

The 1980s is often deemed a boring era for musical theatre due to many failed musicals full of plot lines that were simply not engaging audiences. The need for something new and perhaps "sparkly" to entice audiences led to the success of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats*, the theatrical event that established the **megamusical.** The megamusical phenomenon, a blockbuster extravaganza with huge commercial profits, would become the face of Broadway in the 1980s. *Les Miserables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *The Lion King* would soon follow *Cats*. The **jukebox musical** would also become a popular hit during this era with the smash hit, *Mamma Mia*, which would also be categorized as a megamusical due to its box office success. Often grossing into the billions, these megamusicals would become the driving force for where Broadway was headed. No one can deny the appeal of the spectacle and sheer awe of these megamusical productions. But at what cost? The 1990s would begin to shift Broadway back toward socially relevant stories that would challenge audiences. Titles such as Sondheim's *Assassins* and Jonathan Larson's *RENT*, which we learn much more about later in the chapter, would assist in this endeavor. **Jason Robert Brown,** a new writer and composer, would also emerge and begin to draw attention with his new work, *Parade*.

The New Millennium

The bright lights of Broadway would dim after the attacks of September 11, 2001. While Broadway would only remain closed for 2 nights, audiences were reluctant to return for weeks. Despite this, most of the shows were able to remain open, including ***The Producers***, a Mel Brooks comedy, which had shattered box office records with its witty and satirical humor wrapped in a conventional musical theatre bow. Contemporary audiences proved yet again that they would turn out for a good satire, setting the stage for similar works such as *Avenue Q*, *Spamalot*, and eventually *The Book of Mormon.* Meanwhile, LA's **Deaf West Theatre** would take center stage with its revival of *Big River* featuring a cast of both hearing and non-hearing actors, using sign language onstage, and at times utilizing two actors playing the same character onstage, one hearing and one non-hearing. Inclusive work such as this would light the path for future work to represent a more diverse population in their storytelling and in the artists hired by producing and creative teams; a notable and crucial step forward for musical theatre. Other notable works during this period were *The Light in the Piazza*, *Kinky Boots*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Wicked*, *Spring Awakening*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, and of course, *Hamilton.*

Having gained a bit more information on the history of musical theatre in America, let us take a deeper look at four significant musicals which, each within their own right, assisted in the progression of the modern-day musical.

Oh, What a Beautiful Morning

Lindenwood University's 2015 production of Oklahoma!. Scenic Design by Donnell Walsh, Light Design by Tim Poertner, and Costume Design by Louise Herman.

Lindenwood University's 2015 production of Oklahoma!. Scenic Design by Donnell

Walsh, Light Design by Tim Poertner, and Costume Design by Louise Herman.

Historians and musical theatre scholars agree, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* was expected to fail in 1934. Surprising given its incredible box office success and subsequent notoriety. Let's examine *why* it was expected to fail in order to better understand its importance in musical theatre. For starters, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein both had success on several previous projects, but never together. They were an entirely new team having worked with different partners on their former endeavors. Secondly, the director, Rouben Mamoulian, was given complete control of the production, which at the time was unprecedented and considered risky decision-making. Furthermore, the creative team cast an entirely unknown group of actors rather than the typical stars. They focused on finding actors they believed could *act* and *sing* the part, rather than relying on star power. The story itself was even part of the skepticism. These characters were everyday people living their lives in Oklahoma of all places – not the exciting settings most often seen in musicals up to this point. The musical also began with a single character onstage – and not a pretty young woman, but an older woman, Aunt Eller, churning butter in front of her farmhouse. The leading man, Curly, was off in the wings, not even visible to the audience, and he sang the beginning of the song completely acapella – a first, and a welcome surprise!

So how did *Oklahoma!* come to gain its popularity? Certainly, the rule applies here that the greater the risk, the bigger the reward. The success was in part due to the intelligent combination of all of Rodgers and Hammerstein's past successful elements (think of them as the *ingredients* of a good musical), into one seamless production. The social issues of *Show Boat* were now combined with dramatic dance sequences, musical scenes, love triangles, and a full-fledged psychological dream ballet. Agnes de Mille's choreography vividly depicted Laurey's sexual desires, and her fears and struggle with the two men in her life, Jud and Curly. In fact, Agnes de Mille was the first choreographer to insist that the music be written to the choreography, rather than the other way around. She and her arranger composed the music for the 18-minute-long dream ballet.

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Despite its meager expectations, *Oklahoma!* became a massive hit running for more than five years and offering 2,212 performances, which at the time was the longest run in Broadway history. The national tour would run for more than 10 years while productions mounted in London, Paris, and Berlin. During World War II, the production played for more than a million troops in the Pacific as part of the USO tour, helping to remind soldiers what they were fighting for back home. The most popular songs, "People Will Say We're in Love" and "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" would sell over a million albums and top the charts. The Broadway Cast recording would become the most-sold album in December of 1935. A blockbuster film would be created in 1955 and a revival starring Hugh Jackman and directed by Trevor Nunn would enchant audiences in London in the late 1990s. The musical has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize and received Tony's, Olivier's, Outer Critics, and Drama Desk awards. The New York Drama League voted it the musical of the century at the close of the 1900s, a well-deserved title for a musical that continues to play in nearly six hundred theatres each year.

Something's Coming

1957's *West Side Story* was the next great American musical following *Oklahoma!*. It was the brainchild of its original director/choreographer, Jerome Robbins, who was a choreographer at the time for the New York City Ballet. His co-creators included Leonard Bernstein (composer), Arthur Laurents (book), and joining late in the process was a young Stephen Sondheim (lyricist). Inspired by teenage Latin gang violence in LA in the mid-1950s, the story reimagines Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* swapping the Capulets and Montagues for feuding Puerto Rican and white gangs on the then-run-down Upper West Side of New York City. The team crafted the story of hatred and prejudice, making intelligent changes to Shakespeare's work to increase the dramatic effect, altering the ending for Maria to live and be forced to struggle with the devastating loss of Tony and her brother for the rest of her life. This change intensifies the tragedy that was *Romeo and Juliet* and leaves audiences with the bitter truth, that regardless of any hope they may feel, hatred will not

die. Similar to *Oklahoma!*, there were naysayers who believed the show would flop because it was too dark and tragic. In fact, the production lost its first producer for this reason and struggled to find another until Hal Prince stepped in and raised the funds necessary to move the show forward to opening night.
Maria and Tony perform "'Tonight'". Portland Center Stage at The Armory is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

The show was not popular at first; audiences preferred to attend the light-hearted production of *The Music Man* instead. Until the movie premiered in 1961, the show did not gain traction. Latinx groups threatened to picket the production over the song, "America," for its racist issues. The creative team was all white Jewish men, who had not done their research to learn that Puerto Ricans do not refer to "America" in that way. The Puerto Rican community referred to America as "The United States." A cultural flaw in the story, and one of many according to the Latinx community. The production was also accused of glamorizing gangs and for its lack of authentic Latin casting. Was it an improvement over the MGM Latin musicals from the 1930s, sure, but better does not equal good. In fact, it would take decades for **Lin-Manuel Miranda** to come onto the scene with *In the Heights*, to catapult the conversation forward about the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Latinx people in theatre.

"West Side Story Suite" by PacificNorthwestBallet is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0.

West Side Story closed after just 732 performances. Its dissonant, jazz-inspired score and beautifully intricate dance would not keep it open. Once the film revived the work in 1961, several revivals would hit the stage, including a 2009 revival which included Lin-Manuel Miranda in the role of translator, as this production attempted to solve issues by including more Spanish. The production closed after 748 performances. A 2020 revival attempted to move the production into the present day, removing "I Feel Pretty" and reducing the book to tell the story without an intermission in merely an hour and forty-five minutes. The production received conflicting reviews due to its integration of large video screens, the shift away from Robbins's ballet-inspired dance to hip-hop, and the inclusion of black actors in the Jets gang – a move that critics believe minimized the statement of racism in our country. The production would temporarily close on March 11, when all of Broadway shut down due to the COVID pandemic. It would not return, closing after only 24 performances.

I Hope I Get It

Launching a whole new genre, A *Chorus Line*, took the stage in 1975 as the first **documentary musical.** Tony Stevens and Michon Peacock had worked on a complete flop and determined they needed to create their own work to have any chance at a quality project. Director Michael Bennett soon joined them and they decided to gather a group of dancers to discuss their lives and work with the intended goal of creating the piece from these discussions. After Joseph Papp agreed to fund a workshop, Marvin Hamlisch (composer) joined the team, as did Ed Kleban (lyricist). Bennett had the dancers audition to play themselves and it was decided that the costumes would become what they were wearing that day up until the finale number when they would all appear in the sparking gold costumes with top hats. The set was simply a line of tape across the floor with mirrors upstage.

As if cutting the spectacle and firmly establishing a new genre wasn't enough, the show also introduced subject matter that hadn't been present (or at least wasn't prominent) onstage before—cross-dressing, homosexuality, plastic surgery, divorce, and domestic violence, to name a few. It also revolutionized storytelling at a time when Broadway producers were struggling to pay an entire chorus. Moving forward, the chorus would now double in speaking roles, minimizing the number of actors needed in each production. More significantly, it brought a diverse group of actors to the stage. There were two Latinx characters, one Asian, one Jew, one black man, and multiple gay men. What an impressive shift!

Bennett said of the finale, "It will be the end of chorus lines as we know them. The audience will be horrified at how the chorus line robs the dancers of their personality… They won't be able to applaud. They'll be speechless." Unfortunately, Bennett never got the reaction he was looking for, but at least for the dancers in the audience, the message was clear and appreciated. After a short run of 101 performances **Off-Broadway** at the Papp, A *Chorus Line* moved to Broadway and would stay until 1990 having run 6,137 performances. It was

nominated for 12 Tony awards, winning Best Musical, Best Book, Best Score, Best Director, and Best Choreography. It would win countless other awards and become the longest-running musical on Broadway until being surpassed by *CATS* in 1997.

Seasons of Love

Jonathan Larson's *RENT* would once again reshape musical theatre and the audience's experience upon its opening in 1996. Inspired by Puccini's opera, *LaBoeme*, *RENT* told the story of a group of artist friends who struggle to find their way and to find meaningful relationships in such a virulent world. As opposed to the focus on death in the original source material, *RENT* focused on LIFE. It was full of joy, vivacity, and charismatic characters. It was the first musical in years to appeal to a younger generation. Suddenly there were people onstage they could identify with, who used their language and struggled with the same issues they were facing. It shined a light on what many college graduates were feeling – lost and broke – wondering where to begin and how to make ends meet.

Larson's dream to "bring musical theatre to the MTV generation" was a long time coming. The musical spent years in workshops at the New York Theatre Workshop, moving through rewrites and being trimmed down from its original 42 songs. During the workshops, Larson wrote a short statement to summarize the show. "*RENT* is about a community celebrating life, in the face of death and AIDS, at the turn of the century," he said. This statement would become the creative team's guiding light after Larson's sudden death from a brain aneurism the night before the Off-Broadway premiere.

One of the most significant outcomes of *RENT* was the introduction of $20

theatre tickets for the first two rows of seats in the theatre. The seats became available at 6:00 p.m. the night of the performance. “Rent-heads”, as the fans of the production came to be known, would camp out for hours, even overnight on weekends, for a ticket. They could be found in a line often wrapping around the building with their tents, music, and food, passing the time as they waited for a chance to see this exciting new show. In 1997, this system would move to a lottery, but tickets would remain $20. This low-cost option began to spread to other Broadway theatres as well, finally making theatre more accessible.

RENT would take a toll on the voices of the actors who had the rigorous task of performing the challenging score eight times a week. It was not uncommon to see up to eight or nine actors out at any given time, replaced by understudies, as the leads became plagued by vocal fatigue. *RENT* managed to endure winning four Tony awards, six Drama Desk awards, and the Pulitzer Prize. It would play for 12 years, closing in 2008 as one of the longest-running Broadway musicals.

KEY WORDS

Bob Fosse

Cole Porter

Deaf West Theatre

Documentary Musical

George and Ira Gershwin

Gilbert and Sullivan

Guys and Dolls

Hal Prince

Jukebox Musical

Lin-Manuel Miranda

Megamusical

Musical Comedy

Off-Broadway

Show Boat

Stephen Sondheim

The Producers

15 Global Theatre

Missy Maramara

Isn't Theatre all the Same?

As an art form, theatre is comprised of humans who perform a certain narrative of conflict and resolution through the use of audiovisual manipulations in a transformed space that is shared by an audience in real-time. In this sense, theatre is the same across the globe. However, while all theatre originated from ritual, the forms they evolved into throughout history vary according to the circumstances of the artists creating them in response to the societies in which they lived. In this manner, theatre is an elevated sublimation of the human struggle to understand experiences of conflict. Theatre artists create their art in order to grapple with a *specific* conflict in response to a *specific* set of circumstances for a *specific* audience. It is important to bear this in mind when watching plays from different cultures since their idea of conflict and set of circumstances are most likely different from yours, and you might not be the target audience.

This chapter is an introduction to global theatre and looks at five major areas. It begins with a delineation between the Western World as told by mainstream history as well as the non-Western world from a post-colonial perspective. Then it will look at several theatre forms found in cultures outside Europe and the United States of America, with one example from distinct countries to illustrate similarities and differences from Western Theatre. Finally, it will discuss Intercultural Theater, where different cultures are fused to produce plays. Each of those topics can stand alone and fill a whole library, so this chapter cannot be as exhaustive as one wishes. As an introductory level chapter, the next few pages will describe qualities of distinct theatrical forms attributed to the general contexts in which they were made. This will leave a lot of room for further exploration so feel free to let the ideas pique your interest and spur you on to further research.

West and the Rest

All cultures find ways of communal expression, and as such, it can be said that each culture has its own form of theatre. However, the history of theater often focuses on the Western development of the art form and tends to exclude forms that do not share the same formal elements as outlined by Ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle. This can be attributed to the tendency of historical accounts to focus on the different movements of power within the Western Hemisphere: from the Greeks to the Romans, to the Europeans, such as France, Germany, England, and Spain, and to Russia and the United States of America. The history of theatre follows mainstream historical accounts of the accomplishments in the arts as a reflection of a world power. In other words, history is told from the perspective of the global leader and highlights the accomplishments of its global power.

Power is the ability to influence others. World power is often manifested in the ability of one country's government to influence the economic standing and political behavior of the rest of the world. Throughout historical narratives, this influence is often gained through conquest or a war that has been won in that government's favor. The winner of wars and conquests hold the capacity to tell the story from their perspective in a way that serves them best, so mainstream historical narratives tend to justify their violence and put them in the light of superiority whether it is economical, social, psychological, or even moral. Many of the Western powers from the Ancient Greeks to the modern day have gained their influence from winning wars and conquests, and thus their histories, narratives, and even cultural leverage, have more focus. To understand this fact is to acknowledge that there is another side to the story— that of the colonized, the subjugated, and the oppressed.

War, as the largest manifestation of human conflict, is the subject matter of a multitude of art forms. Theatre, for its part, explores the repercussions of war on the people who wage it as well as the people who suffer from it. Rather than simply reinforcing narratives of superiority, theatre challenges mainstream history's fixation on lauding the accomplishments of those who win wars. Theatre problematizes the dominant narrative and asks the important question: *Why*? Why was the war waged? Why did the actions before, during, and after the war have to be taken? Why must innocent people suffer? And why must we,

as an audience, watch such suffering unfold? As such, history and theatre are different forms of storytelling where the former is oftentimes narratives told by those who establish the power structures, and the latter provides counterpoints by which to re-evaluate those power structures.

In Western History, for example, the Ancient Greeks are described as an advanced culture that originated and developed philosophy, sciences, and the arts. Yet, the Greek classic play entitled *Trojan Women* by Euripides explores the pain of the female survivors of the Trojan War in order to question its necessity. Centuries after it was first performed, *Trojan Women* is still being staged today. A recent staging in 2017 was created by theatre artists from Europe and Asia, who employed intercultural theatre practices in South Korea to commemorate and heal the Comfort Women who suffered unspeakable terrors in World War II. It is apparent in this example how theatre is contrapuntal to history, making the experience, understanding, and appreciation of both more profound and meaningful.

Theatre tackles topics that are otherwise too taboo and unpalatable for polite society to discuss openly. Its live, metaphoric performances of the actions in question intend to pinch the hearts of its audiences, who are suspending their disbelief in a collectively agreed-upon safe space. The pinch, the unsettling feeling, intends to make them consider points of view other than their own—other than the point of view of the dominant narrative. So, while the Western World has enjoyed privileges afforded them by wars won in their favor, theatrical productions even from their own culture have asked them to consider the repercussion of their actions.

Indeed, the Western World has become a dominant force in history because it has actively expanded its territories through various forms of subjugation such as colonialism, slavery, and even genocide, which effectively altered or wiped-out local expressions of the indigenous tribes. There has been much effort to create awareness about these historical upheavals and earnest attempts at reparation, but the violent aftereffects run deep and manifest in societies as cultural trauma. To counter orientalist stereotyping and lend a better understanding of the culture that emerged from the colonizer-colonized interaction, postcolonial theories such as Homi Bhabha's *sly mimicry* and *hybridity* are used as frameworks to balance out the notions of power and culture.

When encountering plays that are not readily listed in different Western drama anthologies, or manifest formal elements that describe canonical plays in theatre textbooks, or are created and performed by people in or from a country different from yours, it is highly recommended to pay close attention to the nuances of the performance. Pay attention to things that are vastly different from what you are used to watching, that leave you discombobulated, and that confuse you. Allow those unfamiliar qualities to inform you about what you are watching, lead you to questions, and ultimately inspire you to seek answers that will expand your understanding of the world.

Puppet Theater

Puppet Theater is found all over the world and has different genres depending on the material used to operate the puppet: rod, string, or glove. It does not commonly find its way into theatre books, perhaps because it makes use of objects rather than people to play out the action on stage. In a way, puppets function in the same manner as masks: they depict a specific character and are activated by the people who bring them to life. Unlike masks that affect the physicality of the performer that wears them, puppets function as the **physical avatars** of their **puppeteers.** While masks infuse performers with character and affect their physicality, puppeteers use precise movement to infuse their puppets with intention. The entire performance makes use of spectacle and music to fully bring to life the narrative of conflict that needs resolution. In Western nations, puppets are often used to engage children, although recently they have been used in Broadway musicals with more adult themes such as *Avenue* Q and *War Horse*. In other countries, such as Japan, puppets are created with great craftsmanship and theatre productions require its artists to have lifelong training in puppetry.

Japanese Bunraku

Bunraku is the traditional puppet theater that emerged in the bustling port

city of Osaka, Japan during the 1600s, which became popular with the collaboration of playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653 – 1714) and chanter Takemoto Gidayu (1651 – 1714). Originally referred to as *ningyo jurori*, it was revived by Uemura Bunrakuken (1751 – 1810) in the 1800s, and was then commonly referred to as bunraku. There are **five main elements** of a bunraku performance:

The puppets

The puppeteers (*ningyotsukai*)

The dramatic text (*jurori*)

The chanter (*tayu*)

The *shamisen* music

These elements are not concealed in the way Western theatre attempts to do so in its theatrical productions. The puppetry is performed on the main stage (*hombutai*) while the jurori is chanted aloud to music on a side platform (*yuka*).

The main element of bunraku is the highly crafted, miniature, life-like dolls meticulously dressed in vibrantly coloured Japanese traditional clothing. The dolls have intricate heads (*kashira*) and hands, crafted by specialists who make sure the heads have moving parts to allow a fuller range of expressions. Ranging from 1 to 4 feet, their bodies are created and clothed by the very puppeteers who bring them to life during performances. The vibrant colours of the puppets' costumes highlight their intricate movements, and pull the focus of their audience's attention. The skilled maneuvering of these intricately carved and painted wooden puppets convey intricate nuances of emotion and complex thoughts.

The second element is the puppeteer, whose activation of the puppet works in tandem with all the other elements, dancing as it were with grace and precision. Three puppeteers (*ningyotsukai*) operate one puppet. The master puppeteer (*omozukai*) controls the head and the right hand of the puppet, the second puppeteer (*hidarizukai*) controls the left hand, and the third puppeteer

(*ashizukai*) controls the lower half. All three puppeteers are visible onstage with the puppets, but the second and third puppeteers are fully covered in black from head to toe. Only the faces of the master puppeteers can be seen but they inhibit themselves from showing any facial expression and let the puppets indicate all feelings, thoughts, and actions. It takes decades of training to move from *ashizukai* to *omozukai*.

The third element is the *jurori*, the dramatic text based on legends and folklore, written in traditional Japanese, with universal themes that are still accessible to contemporary audiences. Plots were either *Jidaimono* or *Sewamono*, the former being historical events that occurred during feudal times and the latter being contemporary dramas centered on the conflict between desires of the heart and social obligation. Canonical authors such as Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725) captured private and public historical events about individuals whose compromised social status forced them to choose self-sacrifice as a means to restore political order. The *jurori* is chanted by the fourth element of the bunraku called the *tayu*, who reads all the lines of the play from the narration to the dialogue of each character. The *tayu* changes voices when necessary, making him a very versatile voice actor. He is accompanied by the fifth element, the *shamisen*, a traditional Japanese string instrument that plays music in the background to enhance the mood of the scene.

From being an attraction for the masses, Bunraku has been refined over the years to its current level of artistry and has been named UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. By not concealing these elements, the audiences can witness the multiple performances that converge in synchronicity, like a dance to music, and appreciate the level of discipline necessary to achieve such fluidity. Furthermore, the excellence of the performance and the story will organically activate the audience's suspension of disbelief and heighten their pleasure in experiencing the entirety of the production.

Other countries also have puppet theater as well: Indonesian Shadow puppets called *wayang kulit* and *wayang golek*, Thailand's *nang talent* and *hun krabok*, India's Rajasthani puppets called *kathputli*, Medieval Cairo's *khayal al-zill*, and China's *zhangtou mu'ou*.

Masked Theatre

The use of masks is a global phenomenon. Western theatrical forms that immediately come to mind are Ancient Greek masks and Italian *Commedia dell' Arte* masks which have been researched extensively by theatre historians. **Masks** function as indicators of recognizable characteristics, and seeing them allows the audience to readily identify personas and their values by appealing to a visual cue that triggers the social memory of a specific stereotype. The stereotypes exist because of a specific set of circumstances, but as social memory expands with the continuation of time, the circumstances for those stereotypes cease to be given focus, leaving the stereotypes to exist outside of their contexts.

Rather than being understood as a product of circumstances, a stereotype becomes taken as a fact that can be applied across the board. Masks get codified in the same manner. However, without fully understanding the circumstances surrounding the creation of the mask, there will be no appreciation of its existence or use. The codification becomes the sterilization of character, and the same can be said of stereotypes. Masks today can be a metaphysical concept wherein someone "puts on" or "projects" a specific character. To understand masks and how they are used, as well as their originating circumstances and process of codification, is to understand the way we ourselves deal with stereotypes and how we deal with impressions.

Some cultures' use of masks is rooted in ritualistic practices. Shamans would wear sacred masks to embody higher beings: from gods to demons, from supernatural heroes to mythical beasts. Masks, as representations of nature and the spirit world, serve to mediate between the shaman and the higher power. By wearing the mask, the shaman takes on the ability and the characteristics of a higher power to control forces beyond human capabilities, heal others, and affect the environment. In Indonesia, the word for mask is *Topeng*, and it is used in dance dramatizations of traditional stories and myths.

Javanese Topeng

The *Wayang Topeng* has been recorded as early as the beginning of the second millennium. It is a mask theatre form that evolved from rituals and Hindu court practices. It incorporates masks, dance, and traditional music to recount scenes from epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana (wayang orang)*, and myths such as *The Adventures of Prince Panji* or the *Pandji* cycle.

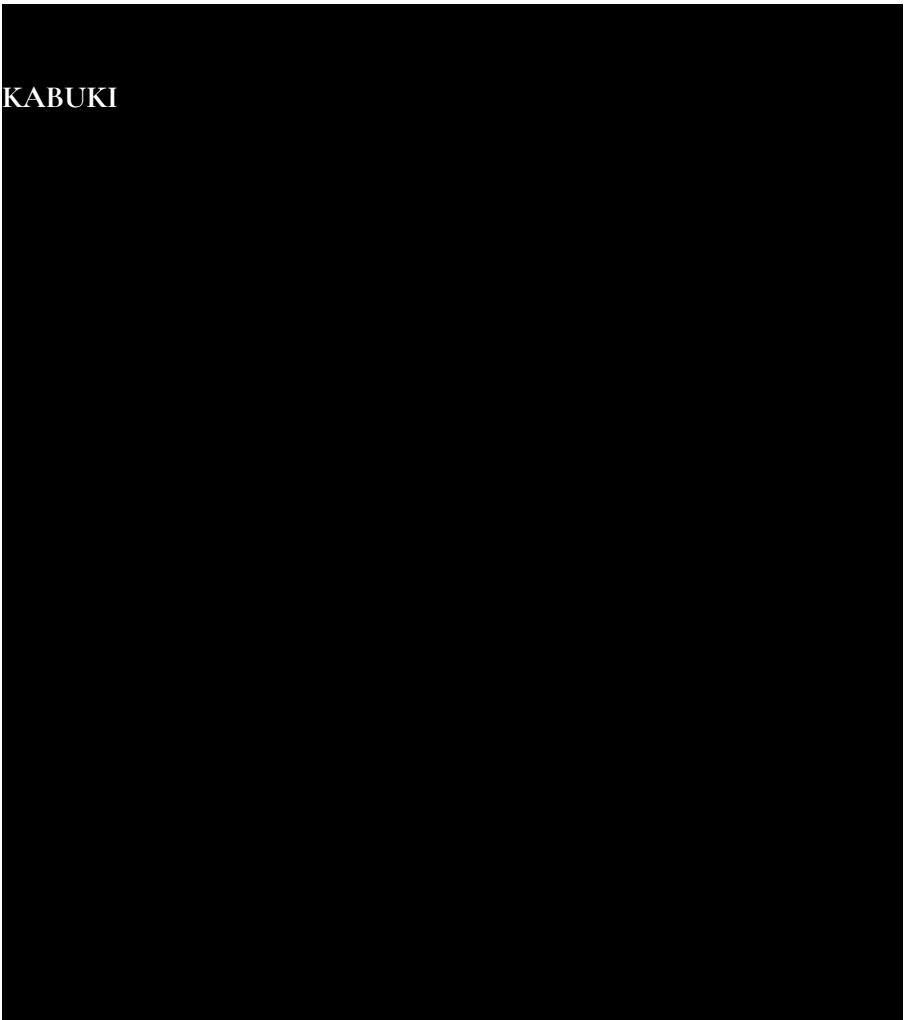
Topeng masks are revered as sacred heirlooms. They are carved out of wood in the same way as the wooden puppets of *wayang golek*, they are painted in the same manner, and they follow the same color symbolism. The oval mask has a broad round forehead, wide-set elongated eyes, a slender, pointy, upturned nose, and a tapered chin. Prince Panji is green, King Klana is red, and other noble characters are white or gold. The clown character has a half mask revealing the mouth. This general style varies according to each local tradition and manifests the excellent skill set of the artists who create the masks.

There are two forms of topeng: the solo actor's ***topeng wali*** which showcases the expert skill and virtuosity of the performer as he shifts characterization with each mask he uses, and the five-person ensemble of ***topeng panca***. It is often a dance-drama where the plot is set and the scenes are predictable. Performers use codified gestures and follow set choreography. In some villages, the masked dancers move while a storyteller called *dalang* narrates the plot and speaks for the different characters by changing vocal registers. The only character who will speak for himself is the clown, who speaks freely and can serve to pass criticism or commentary.

The rest of the costumes are embellished versions of everyday dress. They make use of leather ornaments on the head and ears (*sumping*), an embroidered velvet jacket over a white shirt or velvet breastplate, a short skirt over black, knee-length pants, a waist sash (*sampur*) and ankle bells (*gongsèng* or *krintjing*). The *sampur* is the most important part of the costume as the performer incorporates it into his dance using his hands. There are two kinds of *sampur* that help differentiate the characters: the patterned *sampur cindai* worn for humans and gods, and the plain *sampur gendala giri* for animals and demons. The *gongsèng* is also important as it captures the attention of the audience and highlights the movement of the performer.

While full performances of *wayang topeng* have become a rarity, excerpts and scenes are still performed during important celebrations. The popularity of the form decreased with the spread of Islam in the country and Dutch colonization, but it continues to be an important aspect of Indonesian culture. African masks are also very popular. While they inspired many western artists like Pablo Picasso, they are integral to ceremonial costumes worn in religious activities. The masks are representations of the ancestors and by wearing them, the participants of the ritual fortify the tribe's bond with the spirits around them and with nature.

Other countries' mask theatres include Japan's *Kabuki*, Thailand's *Wai Kru*, Laos' *Phra Lak Phra Lam*, Cambodia's *Lakhon Khol*, and the Philippines' *Morionnes Festival*.



Musical Theatre

Musical theatre has a long history and the development of its form into its many variations is as fascinating as it is varied. The contemporary productions on Broadway and the West End, which enjoy a high-level popularity, have somewhat perfected the roadmap to commercial success, through a rigorous process of constant evaluation from a community of critics, peers, and audiences that exist in a theater consumerist ecosystem. It is a huge industry that thrives on both local and international tourism. Still, it is the manner in which music is incorporated into the storytelling and heightened by the spectacle of production numbers that make musical theatre the popular form that it is. Other countries stage popular musicals that have found success on Broadway and the West End, but they also have their own form of musicals. At times, such musicals serve another function beyond entertainment.

Sarswela and Seditious plays in the Philippines

The *sarswela* is a Filipino musical adapted from the Spanish *zarzuela* that was brought in during the late 1800s. By then, there was a booming colonial theater scene, and the political turmoil in Spain led theater artists to seek refuge in the Philippines. Initially intended to make a profit by entertaining Spanish officials and wealthy locals, *Zarzuela* troupes eventually inspired Filipino locals, who then adapted the form by incorporating the one-act *saynete* to convey their own stories. When the Americans took over the colonial government of the Philippines from Spain at the turn of the 19th Century, the Filipinos, who had just declared their liberation in 1898, were furious. They had fought for freedom from 333 years of Spanish colonialism with the help of the Americans and considered them allies. Playwrights then used the *sarswela* to convey nationalistic messages to inspire the masses and incite action. American officials considered these plays *seditious* and had them outlawed. They are now considered a traditional form and are revived to inspire nationalism.

Because of the western influence brought about by colonialism, the *sarswela* is seemingly the most accessible theatre form of those mentioned in this chapter

to students versed in Western Drama. Like most western musicals, it follows Aristotle's delineation of character, plot, diction, spectacle, song, and theme, as well as the scene-song-dance structure of popular shows. The *sarswela* can be as short as one act and as long as five acts. With a combination of prose and verse, it is either completely sung through or has songs interspersed in the dialogue.

What makes a *sarswela* different from its western counterparts other than its use of the local languages of the towns in which they were written is its political leanings. While it features the everyday life of the locals through love stories, each character and plot line alludes to a deeper meaning. The older *sarswela* plots feature characters that are often allegories for the motherland and her many struggles for freedom. Light-hearted and satirical at times, the younger *sarswela* plots reveal the behavioral culture and values of Filipinos at the turn of the 19th Century while conveying feelings about the current political climate and the yearning for a better future.

Back then, the playwrights and theatre artists were not full-time practitioners whose sole focus was to harness and hone the craft, passing it on from one member of the family to another. They were simply lovers of the art form who took time out of their daily lives to lend their experience in performing in the Catholic Mass choirs to compose songs or passionate citizens who believed in the power of theatre to communicate to the masses. Popular playwrights from all over the archipelago include Severino Reyes, Aurelio Tolentino, Buenaventura Rodriguez, Mariano Garland, and Catalina Palisoc, among others.

With the continued occupation of the United States of America in the first half of the 19th Century, the introduction and advancement of radio, film, and television led to the decline of the *sarswela*. It enjoyed a resurgence when its political capabilities were tapped into during the 1970s, a time of political turmoil and unrest. Today, it lends itself as a historical tool in the understanding of Filipino values, culture, and aspirations.

Other countries also have their own forms of musical theater such as China's Peking Opera, India's Sanskrit Drama, and Japan's N*oh* Theatre.

Intercultural Theater

All theatre is "intercultural" in the sense that different cultures inform each other in the making of any theatrical piece. When we stage Ancient Greek plays and we are not from Greece, when we do a French exit ala Molière and we are not French, or when we perform Shakespeare and we are not citizens of the United Kingdom, it is easy to see why doing those plays would be "intercultural." However, even now, when Greeks stage classics, or the French perform Molière, or the British stage Shakespeare, they are informed by developments in theatre-making all over the world. Furthermore, the Greeks, Molière, and Shakespeare themselves took from foreign influences that informed their theatre-making. However, the notion of interculturality as it is currently being discussed in contemporary times, spurred initially by the theories and discussions of French theatre scholar, Patrice Pavis, is problematic.

Intercultural theatre presupposes that cultures are pure, its terminology and study come from a history of colonialism and cultural appropriation, and its different theorists cannot seem to agree on its basic tenets. Philippine sociologist and theater director, Ricardo Abad ruminates on the history of intercultural theater and on the debates criticizing the field's imperialist origins. He categorizes intercultural theater theorists under two camps, namely "universalists" like Richard Schechner who claim a universal language for the theatre and privilege aesthetics, and the "materialists" like Rustom Bharucha who stress cultural specificity and appreciation for local context and underscore political value. Abad debunks both camps and looks to postcolonial theater instead as a means to approach questions of authenticity, hybridity, and agency.

One possible framework to explore postcoloniality and interculturality is Homi Bhabha's discourse on hybridity in his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994). Hybridity, first taken from horticulture, is the crossing of two different species to breed a third kind. Bhabha's application of the concept to postcolonialism, refers to the effect of the transcultural interaction of colonizer and colonized. The hybrid culture can function as a means of resisting the colonizer's hegemonic power that tends to exoticize the colonized through the minimizing

gaze of orientalism. Bhabha's discourse can be quite difficult to read and grasp for young scholars on an introductory level, but many established scholars explain and apply his work such as Argentinian anthropologist, Nestor Canclini in his book, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (1995). Other scholars have criticized Pavis' discourse such as Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert who wrote: "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis" (2002). Pavis himself has reflected and updated his previous discourse, shifting his earlier terminology away from "intercultural theatre" to "intercultural performance" to refer to productions that incorporate performance styles from different cultures in his article, "Intercultural Theatre Today" (2010).

Differences as Invitation for Expansion

As information about the world becomes more and more accessible, it is important to ask the right questions when encountering different kinds of theatre: How different is the theatrical form of the play and production from the kind of theatre with which I am most familiar? What are the circumstances surrounding the creation of the dramatic text and the performance text? Who are the theatre artists and for which audience are they initially creating their theatrical piece? How different am I as an audience member from the play and production's intended audience? How are my experiences, values, and aesthetic tastes different from those of the theatre artists and their intended audience? What new perspective is this play asking me to consider? What is my response to this invitation and what does that response reveal about who I am? Considering your answers to these questions will leave you expanding your understanding and empathy, and ultimately more cultured than if you had not. Not considering these questions might leave you feeling discombobulated and lost when watching a play created in a different culture.

KEY WORDS

Bunraku (and its 5 elements)

Kabuki

Noh Theatre

Masks

Pandji

Physical avatar

Puppet theatre

Puppeteer

Sarswela

Topeng wali

Topeng panca

Theatre Appreciation: A Student's Perspective

Gillian Canavan

Now that you have made it to the end of this textbook, pausing to reflect on the torrent of theatrical knowledge you have consumed is understandably overwhelming. As I have read through these chapters myself, I've found it helpful to focus on specific points made by each author that has resonated with me for one reason or another and consider how they influence the way I appreciate the art of theatre. Theatre Appreciation is accurately labeled a "survey" course, as it is designed to give an overview of the incredibly dense history and vast inner workings of the theatrical arts, which is no minor task. Believe these authors when they tell you that one chapter is not nearly enough time to adequately cover their respective subjects. So, don't feel pressured to suddenly be struck with the desire for continued research into each of these subjects. Of course, this may be ideal in the eyes of your professors, and even some of your classmates might fall into this category; but if you do not, we hope there was at least one valuable aspect you can take away from this class. As a theatre student who has previously completed this course, I can say with certainty that I didn't feel the urge to study every single topic more in-depth. But what mattered is that I resonated with enough content to spark a change in how I *perceived* theatre. My more casual view of theatre as an extracurricular, or a choice to fill my liberal arts credit, was altered to view theatre as an actual career path—don't get me wrong, if you've found yourself here to fill a credit, we've loved having you and hope you stick around!

Once Upon a Mattress, Spring 2022. Directed by Kiara Pipino. Photo by Matthew Grenier

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Working professionally in the theatre, whether in the realm of writing, designing, or performing is intimidating. The lack of promised financial gratification and stability cause many to abandon their pursuit of a career in the industry, but that does not mean it is not a valid option for a successful career. Look back on interviews with theatre professionals like TJ Young, Alaine Aldaffer, Shawn Irish, and Hal Luftig, and know that they found success by

doing what they love. Each of them was able to find their place within the theatre and utilize their skills and talents to their fullest potential. In my time studying theatre, my own definition of "success" has been altered. Previously, "success" has always correlated to the amount of money in my bank account, but from what these authors have written, to be successful in the industry of theatre is to succeed in telling your story effectively to an audience. As I continue my own attempt to forge a theatrical career, I can wholeheartedly confess that the intimidation factor is still extremely present; but continuing to learn about the facets of the current industry, how it functions, and the history behind its development has made it considerably less daunting. Gaining new artists in the theatre industry is what keeps it ever-growing and ever-evolving, so if you feel the urge to learn more, have confidence that you started in the right place.

What makes theatre such a powerful and long-lasting art form is that despite differences in location, time period, genre, or level of experience, it grounds itself in a universal concept. The purpose for which each playwright crafts their story may differ, but all purposes are achieved through the same means—telling stories to an audience. After reading through the different chapters of this textbook, you can connect them together with the throughline of dedication to telling a story. I urge you to take all the clichés with a grain of salt, because despite how generic it sounds, it is inherent in our existence as human beings. As you have learned by reading the chapter on acting, human beings naturally have the remarkable ability of impersonation and mimicry. Alongside this is the natural instinct to mirror other humans. When we tell these stories, our audience will subconsciously mirror the person or people performing, making storytelling through live performance so powerful. It has an instinctual and unavoidable effect on emotions and theatre artists harness this effect to guide the audience's collective response in harmony with the playwright's purpose and the story's function.

In all honesty, I find that the amount of storytelling present in our everyday lives is grossly underestimated. It truly is unavoidable. Out of habit we tell our roommates about our day as a form of bonding, we complain to our friends about the customer in front of us in at the coffee shop, and we calculate the best way to tell our friends about how "crazy" our Spring Break was (and make them believe it). There is a perpetual awareness of *how* we tell stories to achieve an intended reaction or result from our listeners. Obviously,

playwrights, directors, designers, and actors, study technical elements of storytelling specific to the medium of theatre, but in its most basic form, we all understand how to do it.

We enjoy hearing them, watching them on screen, or reading them on a page, so why not venture into the theatre to enjoy it in a different setting? There are limitless possibilities at your disposal when deciding how you will experience live theatre. You might find yourself in a found space, where the boundary between actors and audience is fluid, or even play the role of "spect-actor" in a project under the umbrella of the Theatre of the Oppressed, gifted the ability to provide commentary on a social issue; or travel to see a Chinese Peking Opera adorned in all of its acrobatics and effervescence; or even landing on Broadway in New York City to see a classic musical, filled with soaring vocals and wonderous theatricality. Wherever you do end up, be sure to take notice of how you feel after the curtain falls. Were you collecting yourself from being moved to tears by a tragic performance? Or giddy from sitting through a side-splitting comedy? Either way, you have suffered a change in your person simply by seeing a performance. It is learning to appreciate the effect theatre has on you that begins your appreciation of theatre in its entirety.

The immediacy of theatre's effects on an audience member is part of its power. When the show begins, the audience must willingly suspend their disbelief and temporarily be brought out of their world and placed into the one on the stage. As Aristotle claimed, seeing a good play should provoke a sense of catharsis, that allows us to safely experience emotions in a removed manner. We experience empathy towards these characters as we grieve for them, hope for them, rage for them, all as we invest ourselves in watching the actors on stage. However, as much as this is an essential convention of theatre, it can also be broken to achieve a purpose. There may be a time when you witness a play in which the playwright takes specific measures to remind the audience that they are simply that: people in a theatre watching actors on a stage. Yet, we are still somehow changed after the fact. Knowing that we are in a fictional, constructed world inhabited by fictional characters does not take away from the collective experience endured by the audience.

Allowing yourself to be receptive to the influence of theatre can be an amazing thing. Every story has a message, or indefinite messages, that spawn from the different interpretations of each person. "Given circumstances" can be used to

describe the concrete details of the beginning of a play or scene, but it also describes the state of the audience that enters the theatre. Many people in the theatre refer to the audience as its own character, after all. In every single performance, the audience is comprised of different people with different life experiences. Think back to the "Applied Theatre" chapter, which focuses on theatre that is directed towards a specific group of people with a determined given circumstance, created with the intention of evoking change and bringing attention to issues that affect that group. Think about what was said about Prison Theatre; the example given about a production of *Waiting for Godot* performed by and for incarcerated people shows how a very specific set of given circumstances affects the audience's reaction to the performance. Or how Reminiscence Theatre is devised from the memories of the elderly. Even if you fall outside of the targeted group of such productions, everyone resonates with different elements of the story, even the seemingly insignificant.

When considering the path of theatre both academically and professionally, know that it is not a field that suits only one "type" of person. If you can't envision yourself as the playwright who composes the story and structure for a production, perhaps you gravitate more towards a position that brings the play to life on stage. Regardless of where you are drawn to, don't shy away from taking advantage of your preexisting skills or unrelated talents and expertise to assist you (there's a reason an actor's resumé has a section dedicated to "special skills"). Something like having visual knowledge and appreciation of art is valuable because the end result of any performance is the presentation for an audience in a physical space. Even when simply reading a script, remember that it was written with the intention of taking on a physical form, it's just in need of the collaborative effort of other artists to forge it into reality. Designers, directors, and even actors must have an awareness of visual composition and how crafting what the audience sees serves the story.

The phrase, "Serve the story," or a variation of the same expression, is often heard in the theatre. If all artists working on a show set this as a goal, it creates a unified world able to support the actors who tell the story. For example, the design of the set must consider the basic needs of entrances, exits, and other

specified elements, but must also work to construct the less tangible element of the feeling or atmosphere of the play's world. Our chapter on scenic design even elaborates on the script analysis done by the set designer, in order to effectively immerse the audience in the world of the story and develop a deeper understanding of the characters who live in that world. This is aided by the lighting design that not only ensures actors are visible, but directs our focus, and creates different moods.

As with any discipline or profession, efficient collaboration is an essential part of success. In Chapter 5, "The Director," we are introduced to the concept of production meetings and how vital they are to the creation of a show that exists in a unified world. Also within this chapter, we learn that directors often do not start out as directors, but find themselves there after working in different areas of theatre. I think this applies to other niches of the theatre world as well, which might seem encouraging to students wanting to work in the art form. You may intend to become a lighting designer and end up a specialist in the properties department, or an actor may decide that the stage-management scene is where they thrive. But on your journey, gain experience with whatever you can. Since the director is responsible for deciding the entire creative interpretation of the production, it helps to grasp what is actually achievable in each department as they add in their respective elements. Though directors are not the only people who should have a well-rounded range of skills. Well-roundedness is imperative to building confidence while working in the theatre in any occupation. In the same way, learning to appreciate all kinds of theatre outside your familiar conventions provides a sturdy foundation for a well-rounded theatre student.

Well-roundedness in skillset must be accompanied by well-roundedness in cultural knowledge and appreciation. "Theatre Appreciation," reaches across the globe and teaches us to appreciate types of theatre that we might have never known existed. Artists tend to be influenced by styles from previous time periods or different locations, but a true appreciation of the art requires an appreciation of the culture it was formed in. Theatre has evolved because of the interactions between cultural groups, but as we continue to learn about its history, we must remember the dominance of western culture in how we

perceive theatre. In Chapter 14, "Global Theatre," author Missy Maramara states:

> The history of theater often focuses on the Western development of the art form and tends to exclude forms that do not share the same formal elements as outlined by Ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle. This can be attributed to the tendency of historical accounts to focus on the different movements of power within the Western Hemisphere: from the Greeks to the Romans, to the Europeans, such as France, Germany, England, and Spain, and to Russia and the United States of America. History of theatre follows mainstream historical accounts of accomplishments in the arts as a reflection of a world power. In other words, history is told from the perspective of the global leader and highlights the accomplishments of its global power.

It is only when we acknowledge this aspect of the history of theatre and know how it affects the development of theatre in the present day, that we can begin to expand our view to appreciate other cultural traditions in the art form. Learning about different cultures is not only important in gaining knowledge about theatre history but it is also built into the process of putting on a production. Designers of shows that occur in a specific time and place must conduct research about the visual elements that are characteristic of that time and place. If the director is taking on a piece that either exists in a culture outside of their own, or addresses issues or experiences that they have not dealt with firsthand, again, they must research those elements in order to be successful. You need to make sure that you understand the story being told and know how to work with the story to tell it in the most effective way. In the same way, actors must also do research because they themselves are the ones telling the story for each audience.

Learning about the process of becoming and working as an actor can be beneficial to anyone, regardless of occupation. If there is any group of people that must practice persistence and determination, it is actors. If you remember reading the interview with casting director, Alaine Aldaffer, she concluded with quite a startling statistic: that only about 8% of actors make a living by acting. Actors pursue this career fully knowing its incredibly competitive nature, but it is their love of the craft that motivates them. What is most notable to me about that interview, however, is her statement that the best actor often does not get

the part. You could be the most experienced, technically perfect, and impressive actor, but if you are not quite a fit for the character and world of the play envisioned by the director, you won't get cast. The point I am intending to be taken away from this is that there is an understanding of serving the story. An actor needs to understand that they are not the best choice to best serve the playwright's story and continue to audition until they find where they can do that. Obviously, things like experience and training matter in becoming an actor, but it is the ability to take criticism and use it towards improving your craft that anyone can apply to their own occupation.

Appreciating Theatre is not only for those pursuing a career in the industry, but can be utilized by all as we gain a more fully realized knowledge of an art form rooted in human behavior and connection. What we learn by studying theatre can be applied to a vast number of other subjects and provide valuable skills to use throughout our lives. To appreciate theatre is to appreciate stories, art, and culture, that has a message, and letting yourself be changed by the experience.

Contributors

Kiara Pipino is an Associate Professor of Theatre at SUNY Oneonta and a freelance director and translator. She has worked nationally and internationally, including Off Broadway, in Italy for the Italian National Theatre, in the Czech Republic for the Prague Shakespeare Company, in the Philippines for Ateneo de Manila University, and in Greece, for Theatre of Changes. Her research fields include the role of women and gender in theatre, classic Greek theatre, and Movement for Actors. She is a graduate of the Universita' degli Studi di Genova (Italy) and of the University of Arkansas and she holds a certification in the Michael Chekhov Technique from GLMCC. She is the author of *Women Writing and Directing in the USA: A Stage of Our Own*, published by Rutledge in 2020, she co-authored *Conquering the Stage*, for Kendall Hunt, in 2017 and she wrote *Theatre and Pietas* for the University of Trento Press also in 2017.

Andrew Kahl teaches acting, directing, and voice production as a faculty member of the Theatre department for SUNY Oneonta in Oneonta, NY. He works regionally as a professional actor and director, is a Certified Associate Teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework, and is a proud member of Actors Equity Association, the Screen Actors Guild, and the Voice and Speech Trainer's Association. Regional acting credits include productions with Chenango River Theatre, Franklin Stage Company, Everyman Theatre, Roundhouse Theatre, Arena Stage, Rep Stage, The Shakespeare Theatre, and The Shakespeare Project. He has directed productions and readings for Chenango River Theatre, Franklin Stage Company, The Baltimore Shakespeare Festival, Shakespeare Project, Theatre L'Homme Dieu, and has numerous credits at the college level.

Ingrid De Sanctis teaches playwriting at James Madison University (JMU) in Harrisonburg, VA. She earned the 2020 Distinctive Teacher in the College of Visual and Performing Arts and Make your Next Move Award in 2019. As a playwright, she creates edgy, challenging plays on such topics as refugees in the Balkans (*Torba*), survivors of violent crime (*A Body in Motion*), and a young woman living with—not dying from- cancer (*Sarah and the Dinosaur*). In 2019 her play *Stained Glass*, was awarded Best New Play in Dayton, OH, and a semifinalist for the Eugene O'Neill Playwriting Festival and recently adapted into a one-woman show. Ingrid is the director of Madison New Works Lab at

JMU and the New Play Development Workshop, an annual showcase of ten-minute plays.

John Bagby holds a Bachelor of Arts in, Theatre Design and Technology, from the University of Northern Iowa, and a Master of Fine Arts in, Scenic Design, from the University of Texas at Austin. John has worked in professional and educational theatre as a technical director, scenic designer, lighting designer, scenic artist, and a props artisan for the last 36 years. John has worked as a designer and artisan for the Utah Shakespeare Festival, the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Cooperstown Theatre, Theatre UNI, Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts, and Vincennes University. John is a member of ATHE and USITT. John is currently a Professor of Theatre Design, and Chair of the Theatre Department at SUNY Oneonta in Oneonta New York.

Bethany Marx is an Associate Professor of Theatre specializing in Costume Design at SUNY Oneonta in Upstate New York, where she teaches courses in costume design, technology, and history. Professional design credits include the Mac-Haydn Theatre, Capital Repertory Theatre, the DC Fringe Festival, the Virginia Shakespeare Festival, the Fairbanks Shakespeare Theatre, and the Phoenix Theatre in Indianapolis. Bethany moved to New York after six years of teaching at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where she designed and constructed costumes for theatre and film. She holds a BFA from the University of Evansville in Evansville, IN, and an MFA from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Michael J. Riha is a Professor of Theatre and has taught at the University of Arkansas where he served as the Head of Design from 1996 – 2013 and as Chair of the Department for the past 10 years. Michael's Broadway and New York credits include: Assistant Designer to Christine Jones on *On A Clear Day You Can See Forever* and the Metropolitan Opera's production of *Rigoletto*. He has worked as an Associate Designer to John Iacovelli at the Southcoast Rep, The Mark Taper Forum, Syracuse Stage, and the Princess Cruise Line. He's also worked at the Muny in St. Louis, MO, TheatreSquared, Fayetteville, AR, and on the national tour of *Fiddler on the Roof*. He is the author of *Starting Your Career as a Theatrical Designer: Insights and Advice from Leading Broadway Designers* published by Allworth Press. Michael is a proud member of USA-829.

Barbara N. Kahl (she, her, hers) holds an MFA in Theatre Design from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, and has designed professionally for over

three decades. She is a member of the Theatre Arts Department at Hartwick College, where she oversees the Design and Theatre History programs. Her research focus is on environmentally sustainable design, incorporating repurposed and renewable materials, and natural dye practices. She presents her work annually at the Costume Society of America National Symposium and the Association for Theatre in Higher Education National Conference, and every two years at the Textile Society of America's Biennial Symposium. Barbara also teaches Theatre Histories including those from Asia, South Africa, and Western Europe. She was a Hartwick College Wandersee Scholar-in-Residence for the 2021-22 academic year.

Dr. Krysta Dennis, producer of Creative Arts at Siena College, works as a theatre-maker, director, and playwright in the US and internationally. Krysta holds a dual PhD from the University of Kent in the UK and the Sorbonne in Paris and trained as a performer at L'Ecole Jacques Lecoq. She is the author of four plays: *Votes for Women*, *The Burden of the Ballot*, *Dutch*, and *Swept Clean*, and has published with Contemporary Theatre Review, Interdisciplinary Network, Routledge, and the Pirandello Society of America. Recent directing credits include: *The Turn of the Screw* (Creative License), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Northeast Theatre Ensemble), *An Ideal Husband* (NETE), *Marjorie Prime* (Theatre Voices), *Aleda* (Musicians of Ma'alwyck), and *Arcadia* (Siena College).

Emily Jones is a Professor of Theatre at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri, where she teaches Acting, Directing, and Stage Movement. She holds an MFA in Directing from the University of Arkansas and a BFA in Theatre from Midwestern State University. She has directed more than fifty plays and musicals for companies and programs across the United States. Her favorites include *Fun Home*, *Silent Sky*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, *Urinetown*, *A Man of No Importance*, and *Jack and Jill* by Jane Martin. Emily is an R-200hr Registered Yoga Teacher and currently working to become an R-500hr Yoga Teacher with a focus on Yoga for Neurodivergent Populations. She is a proud working mom enjoying the challenges of parenting a seven-year-old spitfire who is ready to take on the world.

Missy Maramara holds a Master of Fine Arts in Drama from the University of Arkansas through the International Fulbright Scholarship Program. She is a tenured Assistant Professor in the Fine Arts and English Departments of the

Ateneo de Manila University. Her teaching and theater practice centers on student development, mental health, and gender equality informed by over decades of professional experience in theater, television, and film industries as well as training in Intimacy Direction and Coordination from IDC and TIE (New York City), Moment Work from Tectonic Theater Project (New York City), Movement and Silent Play from L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq (Paris), and Improvisational Theatre from SPIT and Third World Improv in Manila.

Gillian Canavan is a graduating senior of SUNY Oneonta and is working towards earning both a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a Bachelor of Science degree in Theatre. Over the past four years, she has been heavily involved in the SUNY Oneonta Theatre Department and is proud to have the opportunity to voice a student's perspective on one of the foundational courses of the Theatre major. After graduation, Gillian plans to build a career in theatre and hopes to continue her theatre education in a graduate program to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Acting.

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Kiara Pipino

Find below a list of resources related to what has been discussed in this textbook. The list has been curated in order to allow you to expand your knowledge on each topic without going into greater details.

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